

The ten biggest myths in fitness

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

Put these fitness activities in order from 1 (your favourite) to 6 (your least favourite).

- | | |
|----------|--------------------|
| 1. _____ | a. swimming |
| 2. _____ | b. running |
| 3. _____ | c. weight-training |
| 4. _____ | d. rowing |
| 5. _____ | e. walking |
| 6. _____ | f. zumba |

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

fluctuation
downtime

inevitable
awkward

soreness
stubborn

midriff
novice

myth
scales

1. A _____ is something that people wrongly believe to be true.
2. _____ is a feeling of pain and discomfort.
3. _____ is frequent changes in the amount, value or level of something.
4. _____ are a piece of equipment used for weighing people or things.
5. If something is described as _____, it is impossible to avoid or prevent.
6. Your _____ is the part of your body between your waist and your chest.
7. If something is described as _____, it is difficult to remove or cure.
8. _____ is time when you can relax and not work.
9. An _____ movement is one that is not natural and therefore difficult to perform.
10. A _____ is someone who is just beginning to learn a skill or subject.

3 Choose the heading

These five headings have been removed from the text. Read the text and match the headings with the correct sections.

1. Shorter is better
2. Exercise is bad for your knees
3. Scales are pointless
4. There is one 'best' way to train
5. Machines are pointless (or dangerous)

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Soreness is good and scales are pointless: the ten biggest myths in fitness

Advice for how to get fit and healthy is often confusing. But there are some simple truths

Joel Snape

24 February, 2020

With new exercises invented every week, it's easy to think that fitness is confusing – but it isn't. The fundamentals stay the same, and the science is pretty well agreed. These are the ten biggest myths in fitness – memorize them, and exercise with confidence.

1 Soreness is a sign of a good workout

Yes, there's something satisfying about limping your way down a flight of stairs the morning after a big legs workout, but muscle soreness isn't actually a convincing indicator of progress. It's thought to be caused by micro-tears in muscle and tends to happen when you do movements you're not used to, when you deliberately slow down the move you're doing or just do a ridiculous number of repetitions. Conversely, you can eliminate soreness almost entirely by keeping the reps low. There is such a thing as pain-free progress.

2 Lifting heavy will make you bulky

There are two key ways to get stronger: increasing the size of your individual muscle fibres and getting more of them to work together when you need to use them. The first is what bodybuilders aim to do, but the second is what your body would do – automatically – if you had to lift a car off a loved one. Getting big requires specific, targeted training, including lots of volume and extra calories and protein – and it almost never happens by accident.

3

This one's been popularized by modern fitness gurus, who will (fairly sensibly) point out that weight isn't a true measure of progress, as fluctuations in the amount of water being retained can lead to day-to-day shifts in the numbers, and putting on muscle can lead to the numbers going up while you're making progress in the right direction. This doesn't mean you should throw away your scales entirely. "Yes, you have to understand that short-term fluctuations

are inevitable and don't represent changes in body fat," says Emma Storey-Gordon, of ESG Fitness. "But, over time, changes in scale weight are predictive of body fat. Even if you are also building muscle, the rate at which you can lose fat will be much quicker than the rate at which you can build muscle."

4

Actually, it's more like the opposite: properly done exercises will strengthen the muscles around your knee joints, safeguarding you against injury as well as making you a bit more capable of running up escalators. As for running, a 20-year study conducted by Stanford University found that consistent runners (many of whom were well into their 70s by the time the research period ended) showed a lower incidence of arthritis than non-runners as they aged.

5 You can 'spot reduce' fat

Before the days of the internet, the myth persisted that you could, for instance, target the fat around your midriff by doing hundreds of sit-ups. The internet has destroyed that myth but replaced it with the more subtle half-truth that it's possible to single out problem areas by thinking hormonally: that since, for instance, the stress hormone cortisol causes belly-fat build-up, a bit more sleep should help. And while this is technically, sort of, true, deliberately messing with your hormones is tougher than advertised and not really advisable. "The truth is, we all have stubborn fat areas that seem to take the longest to get lean," says Storey-Gordon. "Don't give up, though. Stubborn areas will get leaner alongside everything else. Patience is the key."

6 Less rest means you're working harder

"For most people – especially beginners – periods of recovery between sets or intervals allows for higher-intensity, better-quality movement, lower risk of injury and a greater training stimulus that is likely to lead to superior results," says performance and wellbeing coach George Anderson. Or, in other words: if you push yourself for an hour straight, you'll be forced to lift lower weights, go slower and generally put in less work than you might with some strategic downtime. And the optimum varies – for fat loss, anywhere from 15 to 60 seconds between sets is ideal, but for strength, you might spend five minutes preparing for ultra-intense efforts.

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Machines force your body into awkward movement patterns, goes the theory, reducing the input from important stabilizer muscles and stopping you from moving naturally. But while there is some truth to this, not every machine is the enemy. "Whether you're a novice or a more advanced lifter, machines can involve less setup, allow more work and provide extra stimulus to isolated muscle groups," says trainer Dan Osman.

8 The cross-trainer is the best full-body cardio machine

When done correctly, the rowing machine uses 86% of your muscles across nine major muscle groups. The rower also works with the time you have – if you need a short, horrible finisher, a 500-metre sprint will leave you sucking air and burning fat, while a slower 10k feels almost meditative and the Olympic-length 2k is a test of will as much as power.

9

Anything is better than nothing, and it's certainly possible to make some gains in whatever limited time you have, but longer workouts have effects that no micro-workout can mimic.

10

Is running better than lifting for longevity? "Whatever training style you experiment with, you'll find someone ready to argue that everything else is useless and stupid, that you should stick with them or go home," says Dr Michael Banna. "The reality is, any physical activity has health benefits; the right type is the one that doesn't injure you, make you sad or make you want to stop." Ideally your physical activity should include a mixture of cardio, resistance and mobility work spread across the week – but do what you enjoy.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 24/02/20

4 Comprehension check

Answer these questions using the information in the text.

1. How can you avoid muscle soreness and still make progress?
2. What is required if you want to get bigger (more bulky)?
3. What don't short-term fluctuations in body weight represent?
4. How can exercise benefit your knees?
5. Why are periods of recovery between sets or intervals recommended?
6. What are the benefits of machines?
7. What is the best full-body cardio machine?
8. What is the ideal physical activity?

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5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a verb meaning *walk with difficulty because of an injured leg or foot* (section 1)
2. an adjective meaning *silly or unreasonable and deserving to be laughed at* (section 1)
3. a verb meaning *protect someone or something from being harmed or having problems* (section 4)
4. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *interfere with something in a way that causes problems* (section 5)
5. an adjective meaning *thin and looking physically fit and healthy* (section 5)
6. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *spend a particular amount of time doing something, or make a particular amount of effort in order to do something* (section 6)
7. a verb meaning *behave or work in the same way as something else* (section 9)
8. a noun that means *the fact of having a long life or existence* (section 10)

6 Compound words

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make compound words from the text.

- | | |
|-----------|----------|
| 1. half- | a. ups |
| 2. pain- | b. tear |
| 3. sit- | c. term |
| 4. build- | d. free |
| 5. micro- | e. truth |
| 6. short- | f. up |

7 Word-building

Complete the sentences using the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

1. Muscle soreness isn't actually a convincing _____ of progress. [INDICATE]
2. Some modern fitness gurus argue that scales are _____. [POINT]
3. Messing with your hormones is not really _____. [ADVISE]
4. Periods of _____ lead to better results. [RECOVER]
5. Changes in scale weight are _____ of body fat. [PREDICT]
6. The ideal physical activity should include a mixture of cardio, _____ and mobility work. [RESIST]

8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- If you want to stay slim, diet is more important than exercise.
- Running is bad for your body.
- Going to the gym is an expensive waste of time.