

MATCH THE HEADLINES WITH THE PARAGRAPHS

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

Joel Snape 24 February, 2020

New exercises are invented every week, so it's easy to think that fitness is confusing – but it isn't. The basics 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

Muscle soreness doesn't mean progress. It's probably caused by small tears in muscles and happens when you do movements you're not used to, when you deliberately slow down the move you're doing or just do too many repetitions. So, you can avoid soreness almost entirely by reducing the number of repetitions. There is such a thing as pain-free progress.

2. Lifting heavy will make you strong

There are two key ways to get stronger: increasing the size of your individual muscles and getting more muscles 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. _____
Modern fitness gurus have popularized this myth. They argue that weight isn't a true measure of progress because fluctuations in the amount of water in the body lead to day-to-day changes in your weight, and putting on muscle can make you heavier. But this doesn't mean you should throw away your scales. "You have to understand that short-term fluctuations don't represent changes in body fat," says Emma Storey-Gordon, of ESG Fitness. "But, over time, changes in scale weight can predict body fat. Even if you are also building muscle, you lose fat much more quickly than you build muscle."

4. _____
Actually, it's more like the opposite: exercises done correctly will strengthen the muscles around your knee joints, protecting you against injury. As for running, a 20-year study by Stanford University found that regular runners (many of whom were in their 70s) suffered less from arthritis than non-runners as they got older.

5. You can target fat and reduce it

Before the days of the internet, the myth persisted that you could target the fat around your midriff by doing

hundreds of sit-ups. The internet has destroyed that myth but replaced it with the idea that it's possible to focus on problem areas by changing your hormones: that since, for example, the stress hormone cortisol causes belly-fat to increase, a bit more sleep should help. And while this is sort of true, interfering with your hormones is not really a good idea. "The truth is, we all have areas of fat that seem to take the longest to get lean," says Storey-Gordon. "Don't give up, though. Those areas will get leaner along with other areas. Patience is the key."

6. Less rest means you're working harder

"For most people – especially beginners – periods of recovery between sets or intervals allow for lower risk of injury and better results," says performance and wellbeing coach George Anderson. Or, in other words: if you push yourself for a whole hour, you'll be forced to lift lower weights, go slower and generally put in less work than you might with some strategic recovery.

7. _____
The theory is machines force your body to make unnatural movements. This reduces the input from important stabilizer muscles and stops you from moving naturally. There is some truth to this, but not every machine is the enemy. "Whether you're a novice or a more advanced lifter, machines can allow more work and give extra stimulus to different muscle groups," says trainer Dan Osman.

8. The cross-trainer is the best full-body cardio machine
When used correctly, the rowing machine uses 86% of your muscles across nine major muscle groups. The rower also works with the time you have – from a short, horrible 500-metre sprint, to a slower 10k and the test of willpower of an Olympic-length 2k.

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 short workout can mimic.

10. _____
Is running better than lifting? "Whatever training style you experiment with, you'll find someone who argues that everything else is useless and stupid," 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."

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A Scales are important

B There's no best way to train

C Shorter is better

D Exercise is bad for your knees

E Scales are pointless

F There is one 'best' way to train

G Machines are pointless (or dangerous)