

# Fat-loss myths debunked

By Jean-Claude Vacassin

With promises of 15-minute fat loss workouts, two-minute routines and adverts for the latest workout trend or craze guaranteed to get you in shape in double-quick time, the world of women's fitness is a minefield. But how much of this stuff will actually hold up and how do we separate the good from the bad and the ugly fitness truths?

In truth, much of it is unlikely to work for most people most of the time. In fact, I'd stick my neck out and say that most of what is written about women's fitness is sensationalist stuff that falsely promotes the idea that fitness can be achieved on the quick, and that you need certain gadgets or systems to get into shape. Neither is true.

On the whole, a more positive and sustainable message is permeating mainstream female fitness, but there are still a few myths that we hear regularly that don't stack up, either in research or in practice. Here are three of the most common ones:

## **1. Lifting heavy weights gives you bulky muscles**

It's true that there are exceptions to the rule, but most women who use resistance training as part of a general fitness programme can't and won't gain more than a couple of kilos of lean mass (muscle, bone, connective tissue... you know, all the good stuff), even if they wanted to. This is clear from both the extensive research that has been carried out, and the evidence from increasing practical application.

It is highly unlikely - almost a certainty, in fact - that doing a few sets of challenging weights a couple of times per week is going to see you pack on pounds of muscle, especially if you add some cardio to the mix. Adding muscle doesn't happen by accident, you have to actually want to do it. Lack of calories and poor sleep, together with an unfavorable hormonal environment for example, mean that many women find it very difficult to increase muscle size, even if they wanted to.

Anyway, adequate lean mass is hugely beneficial for women as they approach their thirties and beyond. You certainly don't need muscles in gorilla-like proportions, but you do need enough to maintain good posture, keep you strong and keep your joints stable.

## **2. Cardio is the best form of exercise for fat loss**

Despite extensive research and growing opinion to the contrary, we're still being told that weight training makes you big and cardiovascular training makes you thin. And if you want to burn fat you need to do lots of steady cardio training, best done at a moderate intensity performed in the 'fat burning zone'.

In truth, successful fat loss will be largely down to your diet, not your cardio approach. Plenty of people get themselves in great shape without doing any traditional cardio - some with absolutely no form of cardio training whatsoever. It's one tool in your armoury, but it's not the only way, and it's certainly not the most efficient way.

What works for one person will not always work for another so it's impossible to say that one training method always trumps another for a specific goal. But, if I were going to do a simplistic hierarchy of fat loss it might be:

1. Nutrition
2. Resistance training
3. Interval training
4. Steady cardio training.

You'll notice that nutrition comes first and traditional steady state cardiovascular training is last. It's not that it's not beneficial - of course it is - but in terms of effectiveness and efficiency we see better results when people combine nutrition and resistance training.

### **3. Core training burns belly fat**

You cannot burn fat in a particular area by doing exercises that try to isolate that body part; doing crunches will not target fat that is stored around the abdominals, for example. A toned stomach will only show if your body fat is low.

It is simply not true that crunches, sit-ups, planks and other core exercises alone deliver great looking abs and that if you want a great looking midsection you need to perform these exercises regularly, focusing on high reps for toning. Whilst perhaps beneficial for reasons such as core strength and stability, isolation movements like crunches and planks do very little for fat burning around the stomach. They don't cause enough metabolic disturbance, which is key in forcing the body to change.

Sure, you need to condition the abdominals, the same as any other muscles, but you do not need to spend hours focusing on specific core exercises. If there is injury or weakness more focus might be needed, but a little is enough for most healthy people. Instead, prioritise big multi-joint exercises and don't overdo the isolation stuff, which in itself can lead to problems. Be sure also to balance abdominal exercises with lower back ones to maintain balance.

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