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EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGIST

Melissa Paolino received both her B.S. and her Masters of Science in Clinical Exercise Physiology from Indiana University, where she was on the Dean's list and was also Special Projects Chair. She interned at the Scripps Cardiac Treatment Center, where she evaluated patients in the cardiac and pulmonary rehabilitation programs, creating customized exercise prescriptions and working with patients on an ongoing basis. She then joined Northwestern Memorial Hospital, where she supervised and interpreted nuclear and cardiopulmonary stress tests. She is also currently part of Northwestern's Wellness Institute team, assessing fitness and identifying appropriate physical activity, exercise, and behavioral interventions for a wide variety of clients. She has been instrumental in creating educational materials for patients. Melissa is also a personal

6 FITNESS MYTHS DEBUNKED

Summer is in full swing and with it comes greater motivation for many people to get back on track with their exercise routines. Maybe this is due to the beautiful weather, the increased hours of daylight, or just the thought of looking and feeling better for all the outdoor festivities. Whatever the reason, I thought this would be a great time to make sure those routines were started without bad habits or false beliefs. Below are some of the most frequent exercise myths debunked.

You can get rid of belly fat by just doing abdominal exercises.

Abdominal fat increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and even certain cancers. So while I would love to tell you that if you do 100 crunches everyday you will lose your belly fat...it would be a false statement. Contrary to popular belief, training a muscle group will not burn fat locally. Muscles are underneath a layer of subcutaneous fat. In order to see those strong abdominal muscles, you must first get rid of the layer of fat on top. This is best accomplished through a combination of cardiovascular training, strength training and proper nutrition.

It is better to decrease my intensity and work in the "fat burning zone" if I'm trying to lose weight.

The "fat burning zone" is on most cardio equipment and can be very confusing. This is a myth that is based on fact but applied incorrectly. During lower intensity exercise our bodies may use a higher percentage of fuel from fat but at higher intensity levels the total caloric output and total amount of fat used is higher. At the end of the day our bodies don't care where those calories come from, but that we have a caloric deficit. Make every session count by staying at an intensity level that is challenging but still allows you to talk. For most people, this is within a heart rate range of 55-85% of your maximal heart rate (220 minus age).

It's best to stretch before exercise.

Although many people and coaches still use this approach, it has been shown time and time again that this style of warm-up is not effective. For instance, studies have shown that runners

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who static stretch (gradually lengthening a muscle to a point of mild tension and holding it for 20-30 seconds) before they run actually suffer more injuries than those who don't. These studies found that static stretching before exercise lengthens and weakens the individual muscle fibers making them less equipped to deal with the stress of exercise. Dynamic warm-ups, such as lunges, skipping, high knees, and straight leg kicks, will improve your range of motion while promoting muscular control. This gives you the best chance to move efficiently and avoid injury. Static stretching after exercise may decrease your post-exercise soreness and help to return the muscles to their resting length.

I can lose weight without modifying my diet as long as I'm exercising.

Think of it this way; for most people, it takes about 10 miles of running to burn 1000 calories! It can take less than 10 minutes to consume that amount! Don't believe me? That 8 oz steak and cup of mashed potatoes at dinner was probably at least 1000 and that's not counting wine, bread and salad. Exercise does help to burn off calories, but the overall caloric balance is key. Don't be discouraged: studies show that exercise is the best way to prevent weight gain. In addition, exercise lowers the risk of diabetes and decreases your risk of heart disease by lowering your blood pressure, increasing your healthy HDL cholesterol and decreasing triglycerides. Exercise also improves your sleep quality by helping you fall asleep and stay asleep more readily. Additionally, the psychological benefits of exercise are numerous, including decreasing depression, anxiety and stress. As if that is not enough reason to exercise, studies show that exercise can reduce your risk of developing Alzheimer's disease by approximately 40%.

I know I had a good workout because I sweat a lot.

Sweat is the body's way of cooling itself. Some people sweat more than others do. This is dependent on genetic factors and inherent body heat levels. Sweating does not always indicate exertion. Two good measures of exercise intensity are perceived exertion and heart rate. Perceived exertion is how hard you feel you are working during your exercise session. This is a combination of the effort felt on the muscles, joints, breathing and heart rate. Listen to your body and exercise for the majority of your workout at a level where you could talk but not sing.

Heart rate is a more objective way to measure intensity. An

increase in exercise intensity is directly related to elevation in exercise heart rate and other metabolic processes. Healthy individuals should aim to exercise between 55-85% of their maximal heart rate for 20-60 minutes. A rough calculation of maximal heart rate is 220 minus your age, although your treadmill test here can give us a more accurate idea of your maximal heart rate.

I don't have to do lower body strength training exercises because I do aerobic exercise.

To understand why this is a myth, let's start out by defining the difference between aerobic exercise and strength training (anaerobic). Aerobic exercise is when one performs prolonged, large muscle, dynamic exercise at moderate to high intensities. Examples would be cycling, jogging, elliptical machine and dancing, just to name a few. Although this type of exercise is excellent for improving cardio respiratory fitness and preventing chronic disease, it is not enough to prevent muscle and bone loss. Strength training preserves and builds muscle and makes daily activities easier. In addition, this type of training helps to prevent injury, improves body composition and supports bone health. We recommend a minimum of 2-3 days per week for strength training that focuses on working all the major muscle groups. This can typically be accomplished in 8-10 different exercises to get a complete workout. We also recommend at least 1 day of rest between workouts to allow for ample recovery.

If you have any questions regarding this newsletter or general questions regarding your exercise program, please do not hesitate to email me. Have a happy, healthy and active summer!

Healthy regards,

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