

10 DIET AND FITNESS MYTHS

By Alison Pecush

Myth #1: If you don't eat carbohydrates, you'll lose weight.

Losing weight is a science: Calories/energy consumed vs. energy burned. Whenever you eat more calories than you burn, you'll gain weight. Whenever you eat less calories than you burn, you'll lose weight. According to all the experts and research there isn't any other way to lose weight, besides surgery.

Remember, if you eat too many calories you will gain weight. It's best to eat foods that fill you up and satisfy your hunger without adding too many calories. This translates into eating lots of fruits and vegetables while limiting fast food, chips, crackers, and deserts.

Myth #2: If you don't look overweight, you don't need to exercise.

Even if you don't appear to be overweight you can still be "over fat" inside (which means that your body fat in relation to your muscle mass is dangerously high). High body fat has been associated with a number of medical problems including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer, etc.

Consider that heart disease, which is often the result of inactivity and poor eating habits, kills almost as many people in this nation as all other causes of death combined. That's a lot. If nothing else, you should exercise to ward off heart disease. It doesn't take much more than a daily brisk walk to reduce your risk.

Myth #3: If you exercise daily, you don't have to watch what you eat.

Even if you exercise regularly you should still keep track of how much and what types of foods you're eating. Regular exercise and sound nutritional habits go hand in hand. Without one, the other has a limited effect.

Myth #4: To lose weight and keep it off you must exercise hard all the time.

Absolutely not. Just adding a short, brisk walk to your mornings can help you start shedding pounds right away. And, if the habit continues, the weight is more likely to stay off. Do only what you can comfortably do, eventually you'll be able to do more for longer. What's important is to do something you like and do it on a regular basis.

Myth #5: Getting a little sore is good—it shows you've really worked something.

Delayed muscle soreness means one thing: You did too much too soon. Next time go easier and stop sooner. As you gain strength and endurance, you'll be able to do more and more without stiff muscles the next day. It's better to do less and not get sore. You'll be able to exercise more over the long run and won't need to take time off because it hurts too much to move.

Myth #6: I need exercises to work my 'lower abs' and reduce my potbelly.

First, there is no such thing as 'lower abs.' The six-pack you're going for is actually one long muscle, called the rectus abdominis, that extends from below your chest to your pelvis. To work your abs, you should do exercises to target all four muscles: the rectus abdominis, internal and

external obliques and the transverse abdominis. Second, doing crunches will not help you get a 'six-pack' if you have a layer of fat over your abdominal area. In order to see the muscles, you must reduce your body fat.

Myth #7: If I can't workout often enough and hard enough, I might as well not even do it.

The general rule for weight loss is to do cardio 4-5 times a week for 30-45 minutes as well as weight training 2-3 times a week. Some people simply don't have the time to workout that much and they think, since they can't do all of that, why do ANY of it? Remember: Any exercise is better than no exercise, even if it's only a 15-minute walk. Being physically active is proven to reduce stress and make you healthier. So, even if you can't make it to the gym, you have no excuse not to do something active each day.

Myth #8: Low-fat foods help you lose weight.

'Low-fat' or 'fat-free' doesn't necessarily mean low calorie or calorie-free.

Check the calorie content of foods, especially cakes, biscuits, crisps, ice creams and ready meals.

Extra sugars and thickeners are often added to boost flavour and texture, so calorie content may be only a bit less, or similar to standard products.

Foods labeled low fat should contain no more than 3g fat per 100g.

Watching the quantity is important, people tend to have half-fat spread but then use twice as much.

And things like fruit pastilles may be low in fat, but are high in sugar, which turns to fat.

With low fat foods, look to see where else the calories might come from.

Myth #9: Cholesterol is bad for you.

Cholesterol is a fatty substance that is made mostly by the liver.

It can be bad for us, because it forms deposits that line and clog our arteries. Clogged arteries contribute to heart disease.

But we all need some blood cholesterol because it's used to build cells and make vital hormones - and there's good and bad cholesterol.

Saturated fats found in food like meat, cheese, cream, butter and processed pastries tend to raise low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, known as 'bad' cholesterol, which delivers cholesterol to the arteries.

High-density lipoprotein (HDL), or 'good' cholesterol, transports cholesterol away from the arteries, back to the liver.

So choose unsaturated fats such as vegetable oils, nuts and seeds.

Myth #10: If I skip one meal a day, it'll reduce my calorie intake and I'll lose weight.

Although this may work in a minor way only in the very short term, it fails altogether when followed for more than just a few days. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, your body's metabolism is self-regulating and if you are not ingesting 'fuel' when the body wants it your metabolism automatically slows down to protect its energy reserves. Secondly, most people who skip meals tend to sub-consciously compensate by eating more when they do eat their fewer meals. The real answer is to eat less food, more often.