



Training Articles

Seven Fitness Myths that May Be Killing Your Fat Loss Success

by Poliquin Group™ Editorial Staff
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Myth #1: Cardio is the best way to lose body fat.

The Truth: Except for deconditioned people who are new to exercise, cardio that is aerobic in nature is largely useless for fat loss. Anaerobic and interval forms of exercise are radically more effective.

If you read a lot of our stuff, you might think we've done this one to death. But the darn thing doesn't seem to die. A trip to your local running path, gym, or a chance to eavesdrop on a casual conversation about fat loss, and you know that too many people just aren't getting the message.

Here's the deal people: The purpose of aerobic exercise is to train the body to be as efficient as possible. The body adapts quickly to repetitive aerobic exercise with the goal of using the least amount of oxygen and energy

to perform the greatest amount of work. This does not promote fat loss.

In addition, over the long-term, doing cardio in the absence of strength training leads to the loss of lean muscle mass, which reduces the amount of calories burned by the body at rest (Westcott, 2009). If one doesn't reduce calorie intake at the same rate, fat gain occurs.

See this effect in action with Williams' 2006 survey of 12,568 runners in which only those who increased their weekly distance or running speed over the 9-year study did not gain fat. Those who maintained or slightly increased mileage and intensity had larger waistlines by the end of the study.

What to do about it: Simple solution: Do interval training and lift weights for a much more favorable (and sustainable!) body composition. These exercise modes build muscle, require the body to burn more fat, and fix your metabolism to work at a peppier rate.

They also cause a large metabolic disturbance that elevates calorie burning in the post-workout period as your body recovers.

If you just really love aerobic cardio, or are an endurance athlete, there's no need to stop. Just start lifting because this will help you maintain muscle and improve your body composition as well as your performance.

Myth #2: Dieting is the best way to lose fat.

The Truth: Dieting (both cutting calories and fad diets) rarely produces lasting results.

Dieting is a mindset that is inspired by "some day in the future" when you've lost the weight and get to stop eating and training in an unnatural way, but it rarely leads to sustainable fat loss. You feel deprived and hungry, and it causes you to lose precious muscle just as fast as you lose body fat.

This is a huge problem because as soon as you increase calories, or reduce the amount of exercise you're doing, which everyone does eventually, you regain all the weight, replacing the fat with fat and the muscle with fat.

Weight cycling is this horrible reality that plagues dieters because not only do they have a worse body composition, the cycle causes severe hormonal changes that the body won't recover from.

For example, people who weight cycle slowly increase their starting weight, and develop more inflammation and a higher risk of heart disease than people who don't diet or exercise and remain the same weight.

What to do instead: The best diet for body composition is one that does not generate more than mild hunger. First, focus on food quality rather than quantity, always choosing whole protein, fat, vegetables, and nuts over refined foods.

Second, understand that higher protein diets promote leanness because they reduce hunger and increase the amount of calories the body burns.

Third, plan every meal around whole protein, fat, and a vegetable. This combination will improve satisfaction, balance blood sugar so you stay energized and steady, and reduce cravings for high-sugar foods.

Myth #3: Barbell lifts like full squats and deadlifts are dangerous and will damage the knees and spine.

The Truth: Multi-joint lifts like full squats and deads are the cornerstone of training for body composition. Both

will give you healthier knees and lower back.

You might not use a barbell for your load, but if you're training correctly, you'll be doing some form of deep squat and deadlift. These exercises train your body to work properly and once you know how to do them, they are safer than other versions.

Full squats optimally train the thigh, hip, and lower back musculature: Compared to a heavy deadlift, a squat required about 34 percent greater activity of the lower lumbar region of the back than the deadlift. Further, full squats require lighter loads than partial squats, which means lower compressive forces on the spinal column.

It's also nonsense that deadlifts are unsafe: The deadlift is a fundamental movement in human life. Just think about how often you need to pick something up off the floor, even if it's just your shoes. If you do it correctly, bending your knees and maintaining the natural arch in your lower back, you're deadlifting.

What to do about it: Always train through a full range-of-motion because you'll have a more balanced body. Here are just a few benefits:

- You'll accelerate strength development.
- You'll gain more muscle and likely lose more body fat.
- You can eliminate joint pain linked to faulty movement patterns.
- Most importantly, you won't look like a bonehead in the gym.

Myth #4: You can eat whatever you want and optimize body composition as long as it fits your macros.

The Truth: Though it can work, macros is not the BEST method for body composition.

Macros (in which you eat certain amounts of protein, carbs, and fats every day) may be more effective than calorie counting for the average person, but it ignores a lot of useful "tricks" that have the dual effect of improving fat loss and health.

Different foods are complicated mixtures that are processed in vastly diverse ways by the body. Not only is a protein calorie different from a carb calorie, but protein types differ in terms of digestion rate and how much they stimulate protein synthesis.

For instance, when trained bodybuilders took whey protein for 10 weeks in conjunction with training they gained 5 kg of lean mass and lost 1.5 kg of fat, whereas a group taking casein only gained 0.8 kg of lean mass and lost 0.2 kg of fat.

In addition, some fats actually stimulate the burning of calories. Omega-3 fats enhance the activity of something called uncoupling proteins, which lead to excess calories being burned by raising body temperature.

What to do instead: Focus on food quality over quantity. Educate yourself on how different foods influence the following things:

- Your energy levels. Do you feel energized and focused after eating processed foods? Or do you feel better after eating whole protein and vegetables?
- How different foods influence your metabolism. The sugar and fiber content of carbs will raise your blood sugar and insulin at different rates, which dictate how hungry you feel.
- Exercise performance and recovery from exercise. Eating high-sugar carbs is generally a bad idea pre-

workout, but if you've trained intensely, post-workout is the BEST time of day to eat them.

#5: I can get toned and lean by doing light load, high-rep training.

The Truth: If this were true, all those women at the gym lifting 5-pound dumbbells would be lean and cut.

I'm going to let you in on a little secret: To "get toned" is simple. It means that you want to do two things:

- 1) lose body fat
- 2) increase the size of muscle cells

Both can be accomplished with your typical fat loss training/nutrition program. This will include a higher protein diet, strength training, and some form of exercise that causes a metabolic disturbance so that you burn a lot of calories and create an energy deficit.

What to do about it: Plan your workouts around multi-joint lifts like squats, lunges, step-ups, presses, rows, pull-downs or chin-ups, etc.

Use weights that are between 65 and 80 percent of the maximal amount you can lift. If you can squat 100 pounds 1 time, then you need to use a weight that is at least 65 pounds when doing squats for reps.

Do reps in the 8 to 12 range and sets in the 4 to 6 range. Use short rest periods (zero rest to 60 seconds) depending on how heavy you're going.

Do two interval workouts a week. This can be sprints or high-intensity training with weights (circuits or pushing a weighted sled).

Tighten up what you eat by planning meals around protein, fat, and a vegetable so as to avoid falling prey to another big myth in fitness: That all you have to do is exercise and fat loss will occur.

#6: Shelling out cash for a trainer will get you results.

The Truth: Your trainer probably doesn't know what they're doing.

There are many fantastic trainers out there who will get you where you want to be body- and strength-wise without killing yourself. But, odds are, you don't have one of them.

Surveys of what personal trainers know show that the vast majority of them don't even know how to design or implement training programs, and that goes even for those with a degree from an exercise science program.

Now, you might not be in too much trouble if you're a young, athletic guy who just wants to put on some muscle, since a monkey could probably help you get results. But, other populations, including women, the elderly, people with physical pain and dysfunction, or the obese are in for a bad ride from the average trainer.

What to do about it: The usual things, like being in shape, having lots of clients, or being certified don't mean much when it comes to finding an experienced trainer. Here are a few questions that can help you figure out if your trainer is worth it:

- Do they assess the way you move during your first session?
- Can they explain why you are doing the exercises you are doing in a way that you can UNDERSTAND?
- If an exercise is too hard for you, do they notice and modify it effectively?
- Do you feel better and have less pain after working with them for a while?

- Do they count tempo when you're training. Can they explain why something called "time under tension" dictates your results?

#7: You'll lose fat faster by doing cardio (intervals) and lifting in the same session.

The Truth: Tacking on any form of cardio to your weight workout is a bad idea because recovery is one of the most influential factors in fat loss. And if you're prioritizing cardio (even sprints), you will only produce diminishing returns.

First, workouts should be slightly less than an hour because any longer and the stress hormone cortisol rises to tap into fuel sources from muscle to keep you going.

This is the opposite of what you want to happen at the end of your workout because it means the body is overly stressed, which is never a good environment for fat loss.

Now, strength training is priority number one if body composition is your goal, which means that if you have an hour to train, you should be lifting with focus and drive for at least 45 minutes. That doesn't leave adequate time for intervals.

Second, studies show that when trainees do cardio and strength training in the same workout, they experience poor hormone response during the 48 hours after their workout, with lower testosterone and growth hormone, and higher cortisol.

Third, if you're ignoring the advice to ditch steady-state cardio in favor of sprint intervals, and insist on doing it in the same workout as your lift, let us introduce you to what is known as the "interference" phenomenon:" People who lift weights and do endurance exercise simply don't see the strength or body composition changes they'd expect.

These changes are a result of gene signaling, which is "turned off" or at least significantly blunted when you do endurance exercise.

What to do about it: Prioritize your weight workouts and separate them from interval workouts. You can do intervals on days you don't lift, or you can lift at a separate time of day (lift in the morning or at lunch, run in the evening or vice versa).