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*& fabulous*

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A man with a goatee and sunglasses is leaning against a brick wall. He is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. The wall has some graffiti on it. The text "COMMON EXERCISE MYTHS DEBUNKED!" is overlaid on the image.

# **COMMON EXERCISE MYTHS DEBUNKED!**

# Dr. David Friedman

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In my award-winning, #1 national best-selling book *Food Sanity*, I bust many of today's common diet myths. With so much conflicting information on what we should and shouldn't be eating and what kinds of exercises are best for us, there's nothing I enjoy more than helping to set the record straight! When it comes to exercise, there is just as much "myth-information" out there. One group says steady-state cardio is best, another strictly focuses on resistant training. And on top of that, we hear many tidbits about what time to work out, what to eat and when, and what NOT to do before and after we exercise. It's overwhelming! Unfortunately, some of these false beliefs may be keeping you from getting the best results from your workouts. That said, I will debunk several of the most common exercise myths:

## Doing cardio is the best way to lose weight.



**FALSE!** When it comes to losing weight, your diet is far more important. You can't outrun your fork! It takes seven hundred jumping jacks to burn off 150 calories. However, eliminating one soda subtracts 150 calories. Considering the average person consumes three to five sodas per day, obviously you can't do four thousand jumping jacks every day to erase lousy dietary choices. Also, doing cardio can actually increase weight gain

because it lowers leptin levels, the hormone that tells you when you're full or satisfied. Research published by *Science Direct* found that aerobic training resulted in a significant decrease in leptin serum levels, from 28.42 ng/mL down to 17.10 ng/mL, after people did cardio, compared to no changes in the control group. In another study published by the *Journal of Sports Science & Medicine*, researchers found significantly lower leptin concentrations in trained males after 60 minutes on the treadmill. When leptin levels decrease, it's more difficult for the body to shed weight. This explains why people often feel hungry after doing cardio compared to other forms of exercise. Cardio should be a part of your exercise regimen; however, it's not the answer to losing those unwanted pounds. You lose weight in the kitchen and get toned in the gym. Weight loss is 80% diet and 20% exercise.

## Sit-ups are a great exercise for your abs.



**FALSE!** As a health expert for Lifetime television's syndicated morning show, I had the honor of debunking this exercise myth to millions of viewers. Sit-ups (and crunches) only work your superficial abdominal muscles and fail to engage your core group of muscles. The main difference between your core and your abs (or rectus abdominal muscles) is that the core covers all the muscles in the abdominal area that are responsible for functional strength and stability. Sit ups will not bring you that six pack set of abs and doing them can cause injury to your neck and back. The plank is by far the best exercise for abdominal strengthening and core conditioning. In addition to working all the abdominal muscles, planks also work the glutes, hamstrings, and supports proper posture and

balance. To perform a plank, go into a push up position and rest your upper body weight on your forearms. Keeping your back straight and holding this position for 30 to 60 seconds will strengthen your abs, back, and core without causing any injury to your back or neck.



### Forearm Plank

To work your love handles (obliques,) do a side plank by shifting and putting all your weight on one forearm (see example.) As you progress, you can point your other arm straight into the air. Hold this pose for one minute.

### Forearm Side



### You need to stretch before a workout.



**FALSE!** People believe that loosening up their muscles will get them nice and limber for their workout, thus minimizing the chance of any muscle tears or pulls. The truth is, doing pre-exercise stretches (toe touches, back extensions, and side shoulder pulls) before exercising may do more harm than good. The reason is, when muscles are looser, they can act like an overstretched rubber band, generating less force than one that is taut. You are much better off doing dynamic stretches, which involve movement. This includes arm or leg swings and neck rotations. Unlike static stretching, dynamic stretching increases blood flow and primes muscles for action, which improves performance. According to research published in October 2017 by the Journal of Sports Medicine, if the goal of a pre-exercise warm-up is to increase joint range of motion and to enhance muscle force and/or power, dynamic stretching is far better than static stretching. Save those static stretches for after your work out, when your muscles are loosened up and warm.

### Running on a treadmill puts less stress on your feet and knees than running outside.



**FALSE!** Humans are not designed to walk in the same place, over and over. In nature, we walk on grass, over tree roots and rocks, and up and down hills. We naturally turn corners and we step over things. This natural flow of walking allows for diversity of movement and an even weight distribution on each joint. When you do repetitive walking in the same exact place for 30-45 minutes, you are more likely to wear out and cause injury to your knees and feet. Also, a treadmill maintains a steady speed which impedes your body's natural tendency to adjust its pace as necessary. The forced speed of the treadmill can cause knee pain because it makes you go too fast or too slow. This stress on the feet and knees can cause irritation and inflammation to the tendons, ligaments and other tissues connected to these joints.

You're better off running outside around the gym than running on a stationary treadmill inside the gym. If you want to use a cardio machine, opt for the stationary bike, elliptical trainer, or stair master.

### Strength training will make females bulk up.



**FALSE!** I can't count how many times one of my female patients have told me they are afraid to go to the gym because they don't want to look like a female version of Arnold Schwarzenegger. That's not going to happen. The average female has 20 times less testosterone than men do. Testosterone aids in muscle building. Since men have more of this hormone than females, they build muscle at a quicker and easier rate than

women do. Female body builders that have aesthetically large muscles, didn't get that way from just lifting weights! They either have a genetic profile that predisposes them to large bulky muscles, or they are getting hormonal injections. Female body builders also eat massive amounts of food and dehydrate themselves to the point of visible muscle striations. Unless you follow this strict regimen, lifting weights will improve your muscle tone but will not bulk you up like a professional bodybuilder.

### You should work out every day.



**FALSE!** Many people believe the more you go to the gym, the healthier they will be. Vigorous training and weight lifting creates tiny tears in your muscles that can only repair during rest. This repair process is what makes your muscles stronger. It's important to give your body enough time between workouts to rest and recover. Not allowing your muscles to rejuvenation means, once you get back to the gym, your muscle fibers will be too worn out to grow. Also, overtraining can cause your body to decrease the number of calories that you burn, which makes it much more difficult to lose fat. To ensure that you don't over do it, exercise three times a week. On the other days, relax and allow your muscles to heal. If you want to add some fitness in on those off days, choose something that involves less intensity like bike riding, swimming, or yoga. If you are a gym rat and absolutely feel the need to pump iron every day, make sure you alternate muscle groups on different days to give the other areas time to recoup. If you reach a point of exercise burnout or plateau, take a break from the gym for a couple of days.

### Muscle turns into fat if you stop working out.



**FALSE!** When I have a patient come in that's suffering with a neck or back injury, I often suggest they stay away from the gym

so they can heal. Many of them (especially men) tell me they can't do that because if they don't work out "their muscle will turn into fat." For the record, fat can't transform into muscle nor will muscle ever turn into fat. While you can lose muscle mass and gain fat, one has nothing to do with the other. Okay, but what about those muscular athletes that stop working out and end up getting fat? Many people who stop exercising often continue to consume the exact same amount of calories they ate during their more active days, despite the fact that their energy expenditure is not what it used to be. This can create the misconception that a lean six-pack and bulging set of biceps turned to fat. In reality, muscle and fat are two completely different type of tissues that never convert to the other.

### Avoid sex before a competition.



**FALSE!** Abstinence from sex has long been considered essential for success in sports. It's considered bad luck to indulge the night before a race or competition. While many coaches around the country tell their athletes to abstain, there is simply no research to support this. A 2016 study published in *Frontiers in Physiology* concluded, "There is no negative impact of sexual activity the night before competition." In another study published in 2017 by *Annals of Applied Sport Science*, researchers concluded, "Sex before a competition will not affect athletic performance." One study, which involved male athletes, measured grip strength the morning after they had sex with their wives and repeated the test after the men had abstained for at least six days. There were no differences in test results. However, subjects who had sex two hours before the test had higher heart rates during post-exercise recovery. That said, it might be a good idea to abstain from having sex at least two hours before the game or race.

## Sports drinks are good for you.



**FALSE!** Most sports drinks are awful for you. They are loaded with sugar. Gatorade, the most popular sports drink, contains 34 grams of sugar per 20-ounces! That means, if you worked out for a half an hour and drank a Gatorade afterwards, this could defeat the progress you made. Also, sports drinks like Gatorade and Powerade contain food dyes, such as Red No. 40, Blue No. 1 and Yellow No. 5. These artificial dyes are derived from petroleum and may increase the risk of allergies, hyperactivity, learning impairment, irritability, and aggressiveness. They've also been linked to cancer in animal studies. You are better off drinking water during and after a work out. If you want to add some flavoring, try squeezing in some lemon, orange, or mixed berries. They are chock-full of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that naturally help aid in muscle repair.

## The best time to work out is early in the morning.



**FALSE!** If you're old enough to remember the first Rocky movie, Rocky Balboa's daily regimen included waking up before dawn, drinking two raw eggs, and starting his daily workout. The truth is, drinking raw eggs (a salmonella risk) and working out before dawn isn't the smartest choice. While many athletes prefer working out during the early morning hours, according to a study published in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*, you'll perform your best if you hit the gym around 4:00 p.m. The major findings of this study concluded that athletic performance was better during the afternoon compared with the morning.

The medical journal *Sleep* published results of a study that found three hours after waking up in the morning, athletes have less isokinetic

strength compared to their afternoon measurements. The *British Journal of Sports Medicine* found that professional swimmers were slower in the morning, compared to evening swimmers, regardless of the time the athlete was accustomed to training. Another study published by the *World Journal of Sports Science*, showed soccer performance improves in the afternoon as well. So, the ultimate early morning exercise should be hitting that snooze button and sleeping in. Getting good quality sleep promotes the secretion of growth hormone, which helps the body burn fat and increase muscle growth!

## When doing the bench press, the bar should touch your chest.



**FALSE!** For several years I was heavily into bodybuilding and always believed when it came to the bench press, the bar needed to hit my chest, or I was not fully working out my pecs. Unfortunately, this can put undue strain on the shoulders and even cause serious shoulder injuries. I speak from experience. I ended up tearing my rotator cuff, a common injury among body builders. When you're benching, it's best to stop the bar about two inches above your chest. You'll get the same chest work out, without putting added strain on your shoulders. Also, to keep from having a shoulder injury, avoid bench-pressing with a really wide grip. A medium grip works better and puts much less strain on the shoulders. If you already have a shoulder injury and want to work out your chest, a dumbbell bench press is a better option. This limits the width of the arms and places less stress on the shoulders than doing a barbell bench press.

## You Need to Take Supplements to Build Muscle.



**FALSE!** If you read any fitness or body building magazine you will be bombarded with advertisements for the latest products with names like, "Rocket Fuel," "Turbo Max," and "Massive Annihilation!" These sound

like titles to a Sylvester Stallone movie. If you're a serious bodybuilder and do weight training every day for hours, supplements are helpful. But for the average person who lifts weights 2-3 times a week to stay fit and wants to build a little muscle mass, they are not necessary. If you are consuming a whole food diet that has an array of protein, carbs, and healthy fats, you are fine. So many people believe they need to overdo it on the protein after a work out. Eggs, or a lean piece of organic chicken or wild-caught fish, offer plenty of protein, vitamins, minerals, and muscle building amino acids.

### The more you sweat, the more fat you will lose.



**FALSE!** Many people go to the sauna to sweat, believing it will help them lose some of their unwanted fat. One guy in my neighborhood runs around the block on sunny days wearing a raincoat because it makes him sweat more. Some athletes wrap themselves in a trash bag while lifting weights so they will sweat more and burn fat. Actually, sweat has nothing to do fat loss; it's just your skin's way of cooling down your body when it gets over heated. Fat is oxidized deeper inside your body, and it will not vaporize because you're sweating! If high-intensity exercise is causing you to sweat, this means you are burning calories—many of which may come from fat. But, forcing yourself to sweat more by working in hot conditions or wearing heavy clothes will not lead to additional fat loss. ~Dr. David Friedman



Dr. David Friedman is the international award-winning, #1 best-selling author of [Food Sanity, How to Eat in a World of Fads and Fiction](#). He's a Doctor of Naturopathy, Clinical Nutritionist, Chiropractic Neurologist, Board Certified Alternative Medical Practitioner, and Board Certified in Integrative Medicine. As Lifetime television's morning show health expert and syndicated radio host, he's shared his cutting-edge health features to millions of people every week. Dr. Friedman has been featured on ABC, CBS, NBC, E!, Discovery Health, FOX news, FitTV, The Food Network, Discovery Channel and more. He's a contributing writer for U.S News & World Report, Newsweek, Better Nutrition, Readers Digest, and Woman's World, just to name a few. Friedman's list of clients has included many top celebrities like John Travolta, Jenny McCarthy, Jamie Lee Curtis, Val Kilmer, and Paul Newman. Dr. Friedman hosts the syndicated program [To Your Good Health Radio](#), which has changed the face of talk radio by incorporating entertainment, shock value and solutions to everyday health and wellness issues. For more information go to: [DrDavidFriedman.com](#) and [ToYourGoodHealthRadio.com](#)  
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