

# A Random Selection of Exercise Fairy Tales

## "Exposing a Few Exercise Myths"

By Rick Sullivan

Arthur Jones, the founder of Nautilus Sports/Medical Industries, in an address to the Physical Education Association blatantly summed up the present state of fitness in this country with the following statement:

"If everyone in the United States realistically rated his or her lifetime average physical fitness on a scale from -10 to 10 the combined overall average would be -4. Physical fitness activities have caused more harm than good. Furthermore, if everyone in the United States suddenly stopped participating in fitness activities, the health of the nation would improve significantly within a matter of weeks. The average score would soon rise closer to zero."

The implication is not that exercise is bad - the problem is the methodology. Exercise should set the stage for improved muscular tonus or growth. Implemented properly, exercise will stimulate your body's growth mechanisms to adapt to this imposed demand by becoming stronger, tighter and fitter. However, our means of exercise may not be producing any positive exercise benefit whatsoever. In fact, in too many cases it is counterproductive. If you exercise haphazardly or inappropriately you will overburden and damage the entire system undermining all your exercise efforts.

How many people do you know who have joined a gym and in a matter of days were overwhelmed, feeling lost and confused only to abandon their pursuit of improved health and well being? Or perhaps you have had a friend or loved one who through their quest for fitness had to have arthroscopic knee or shoulder surgery or maybe they've just been spending too much time at their chiropractor's office. And certainly you must know a few people who spent a small fortune on a piece of exercise equipment only to hang clothes on it. Statistics would suggest that you know quite a few people who fit these descriptions. More than 70% of all people who begin exercise programs drop out within the first few months and nearly 20 million Americans sustained exercise related injuries last year alone. Why?

The reason is that people are befuddled with all the conflicting, misleading, erroneous information that floods the media, and fitness centers. There are so many myths being fathered by so called "experts", including the plethora of bandwagon entrepreneurs looking to make a quick buck, it's no wonder so many people avoid exercise.

We know exercise is vitally important, it adds significantly to your physical health and overall quality of life. It is extremely frustrating to me to see

so many people turned off to exercise because they have been led down a path of futility. They were never able to experience the many rewards of meaningful exercise due to unmerited exercise practices they were advised to engage in. I will attempt to extinguish what I consider to be the most common and misleading exercise folklore.

## Aerobic Exercise is the Best Activity for Weight Loss

It has long been believed that strength training was great for "toning" but if you wanted to lose weight you absolutely had to do some sort of aerobic exercise. This myth is wearing thin. The current research has repeatedly shown that strength training has produced far more fat loss as well as more total weight loss than aerobic exercise. While the combination of aerobic exercise and strength training has clearly produced better results than aerobic training alone research suggests that even better results may be derived from strength training without aerobics.

Ellington Darden, Ph.D., the author of some of the most effective diet and exercise programs available, did one such study that was rather enlightening. He observed 98 subjects (33 men and 65 women) over an 8 week period. The subjects were broken up into 3 groups:

- 1) Diet, Strength Training, and Aerobics
- 2) Diet and Aerobics Only
- 3) Diet and Strength Training Only

(Diets consisted of 1,250 calories/day for women and 1500 calories/day for men.)

At the completion of the study group #1 gained 2 pounds of muscle and experienced a 10.1 pound fat loss. Group #2 actually lost 0.3 pounds of muscle tissue and lost only 3.2 pounds of fat. To the surprise of many group #3 did far better than the other 2 groups. Group #3 gained 2.4 pounds of muscle and lost 18.1 pounds of body-fat, that's 81% better than group #1 and 417% better than group #2. WOW!

Muscle is the key ingredient to any weight/fat loss program. Firm, lean muscle tissue is metabolically active, burning calories 24 hours a day. You can boost your fat burning capabilities by 1750-2600 calories a week by adding just 5 pounds of muscle to your body (that is 26-38 pounds of fat a year). The problem is that too much exercise will over stress your body (especially when combined with a calorie restricted diet) and thwart its ability to mobilize fat. Make sure you exercise intensely enough to stimulate your body's growth mechanism and rest

enough to allow the muscle building process to take place.

### **Free-weights are Better for Building Muscle**

This notion seems to be much more prevalent amongst men although they certainly don't hold the mortgage to such a thought. The common belief is that free-weights allow for greater variety of movement involving more stabilizing muscles and therefore stimulate more muscle growth while machines are better for defining and toning a muscle. This is complete baloney! You need to inroad (deplete) your muscles momentary level of strength to stimulate muscular hypertrophy; either you are building muscle or you are not. You can not define a muscle with certain exercises and build it with another. Moreover, most machines are actually designed around muscle/joint function so rather than a resistance curve dictated by gravity (as with free-weights) most machines (i.e. Nautilus, Med X, Hammer Strength, etc.) are designed to work around the unique strength curves of the individual muscle groups. While free-weights can be a very effective tool if used properly, because of their inefficient strength curves most free-weight exercises will limit the degree of muscle penetration as compared to a well designed machine.

Your first priority should be the proper implementation of the exercise (free-weights or machines). However, if you are using correct exercise form you will be able to get much deeper into your muscles with high quality machinery as compared to free-weights. The deeper muscle penetration made possible by machines will produce greater gains in muscular strength and development; this sets the stage for all other strength training benefits.

### **Cardiovascular Exercise is the Key to Good Health**

Fortunately this "cardio" paradigm is changing, however there are still many who worship the sweat dripping illusion that cardiovascular exercise is the ultimate exercise for health. We have

been running, cycling, dancing and stepping our hearts out for more than 20 years, meanwhile the incidence of cardiac disease is at an all time high. Despite medical advances, multiple revisions of the US Recommended Daily Allowances, and increases in our physical activity, we are still dying. One thing that has not changed over the past 2 decades is the alarming amount of muscle tissue we lose as we age. The average woman will lose half her muscle tissue by the time she is 65 years old and as a direct result will gain 75 pounds of artery clogging fat. Simply look around, these statistics are painfully obvious.

The heart muscle is essentially dependent on the function of your skeletal muscle. As our muscles atrophy (deteriorate) our ability to carry out the tasks of daily living become more difficult until eventually we have weakened to the point of virtual immobility. We can not walk up a flight of stairs without being completely exhausted. Our muscles have become so weak that our own body weight is too much to carry. Such a condition is very common among seniors and not so uncommon among adults' decades younger. As these once simple tasks become more of a struggle we place progressively greater demands on the heart. This musculo-skeletal erosion can lead to cardiac dysfunction and premature death.

The impact of strength training and the development of your muscular system can have a profusion of health benefits. Some of these benefits include improved body leanness, increased physical capacity, more efficient cardiac function, higher resting metabolism, decreased susceptibility to injury and disease, increased bone density, boosted immune system function, increased gastrointestinal transit time, decreased cholesterol and blood pressure, as well as decreased levels of stress. Essentially if you do not strength train it will have negative ramifications on your quality of life. Cardiovascular exercise is not the only or the best exercise choice - strength training should be your first line of defense!

I have mentioned merely 3 myths amongst hundreds. The bottom line is we must question our goals, exercises, and body's functional capabilities, making sure all are in alignment with the exercise program we choose to engage in. Think critically, ask questions and give it your all, good luck!

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