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STRENGTH TRAINING MYTHS

busted

Myths about lifting weights abound when, in reality, a set of dumbbells can be your best fitness friend, promoting weight loss and boosting bone health. We asked celebrity trainer Bob Greene (he used to train Oprah)—whose newest book is *20 Years Younger: Look Younger, Feel Younger, Be Younger*—for help busting seven common weight-training misconceptions.

BY DENISE SCHIPANI

Perfect Form

Myth

Light weights and lots of reps is better than heavy weights and fewer reps.

BUSTED: You might believe that lifting lighter weights and doing more repetitions will give you better strength and toning results, but in fact, the opposite is true, says Greene. "It's only when your muscles are taxed to the point that you can barely lift the weight anymore that your muscles get stronger." Ditch the 3- and 5-pounders and reach for whichever weight challenges you. A good rule of thumb: If you do a set of 10 to 12 reps of an exercise, the final rep or two should be almost too hard to complete without losing proper form.

Myth

Weight training makes women bulky.

BUSTED: There is a reason this myth persists. When you begin weight training, your muscles retain water, which may make you feel bulkier temporarily. Also, it takes about three to six months before real results show, says Greene. Stick with it without fear of resembling a bodybuilder. "The vast majority of women just don't have enough testosterone to look like a bodybuilder," says Greene.

Myth

Weight training leaves you less supple and flexible.

BUSTED: Only if you don't stretch and add in moves that boost balance and flexibility. "If you aggressively weight train to the exclusion of other exercises, you can end up less flexible," says Green, and thus more vulnerable to injury. Avoid the problem by stretching after each workout and adding in activities such as Pilates or yoga, which combine strength and flexibility.

Myth

Weight training can hurt your joints.

BUSTED: "Actually, if you do it right, strength training helps maintain joint health," says Greene. The key is to get the form right (see sidebar, right). Take a squat, for example. If you maintain a 90-degree ankle in your bent knee, you'll be strengthening the muscles that support and protect the knee joint (quadriceps and hamstrings) instead of hurting it. "Injuries only happen if you habitually do an exercise wrong, or if you over-train," says Greene. If you're a newbie, get help from a qualified trainer.



Celebrity trainer Bob Greene walks you through three moves to try at home, with specific emphasis on form. All you need is a pair of sneakers and a set of weights.

→
3 SETS,
8 TO 10
REPS
EACH



Squat

WORKS QUADRICEPS AND HAMSTRINGS

Stand with feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart, back straight, head up and toes and knees pointed slightly out. There should be a slight bend in your knees. Hold a weight in each hand, with palms facing inward.

Contract your abs. Bend your knees gradually, lowering your body, as if you were going to sit in a chair, until your thighs are almost parallel with the floor. Never go farther than this: think of creating a 90-degree angle at your knee, and push your butt back so that your knees never extend past your feet/ankles. Inhale on the way down; exhale as you come up.

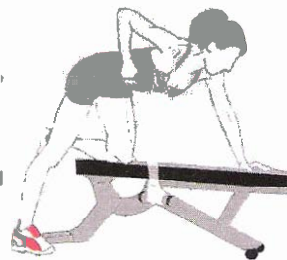
One-armed row

WORKS THE BACK AND SHOULDERS

Rest your left knee on a bench or chair and support your upper body with your left hand, also on the chair. Hold a weight in your right hand with your arm hanging loosely beside you, palm facing inward.

Holding your abs muscles tight to stabilize your body, bend your right elbow and raise the weight to about chest height. Your right elbow should point up, above your shoulder. Pause, then lower to the starting position. Exhale as you lift; inhale on the way down.

⌚ 3 SETS (EACH SIDE),
8 TO 10 REPS
PER SET



→
3 SETS,
8 TO 10
REPS
PER
SET



Triceps extension

WORKS THE BACKS OF UPPER ARMS (TRICEPS)

Stand with your feet slightly apart and your knees slightly bent. Raise one weight above your head and hold it with both hands, fingers intertwined. Your arms should be fully extended but don't lock your elbows. Keep your back as straight as you can, without arching your lower back.

Bend your elbows to lower the weight behind your head and neck until your forearms are parallel to the floor. Keep your upper arms in place, close to your head. Pause for a second, then raise the dumbbell to starting position. Inhale while lowering and exhale while raising.

*Exercises courtesy of Bob Greene.
For more info, go to 20yearsyounger.com.

Myth

Weight training turns fat into muscle.

BUSTED: If only! “Fat can’t turn into muscle any more than muscle can turn into fat,” says Greene, though this myth is a stubborn one. Part of what happens is that as you increase strength training, the number on the scale may not budge—or it may even go up—because muscle is heavier than fat. The good news is that muscle is also more metabolically active than fat tissue, which means that it takes more calories just to maintain your stronger muscles. In fact, a study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that women who embarked on a high-intensity resistance-training routine gained less weight as they aged.

Myth

After weight training, you should feel sore.

BUSTED: Yes, but only a little bit. You shouldn’t feel so sore that you can’t get out of bed, says Greene, but you should be aiming to feel somewhat sore about a day or two after a resistance-training workout. “Soreness is caused by a buildup of byproducts in your muscle tissue,” which only happens when the muscle has worked hard. So feeling a little soreness in your triceps or pectoral muscles or abs 24 to 48 hours post-workout is your signal that your body’s on its way to better fitness.

Myth

You can use weight training to lose weight in one area of your body.

BUSTED: “All of us burn off fat in genetically pre-determined ways and areas,” says Greene, which means only Michelle Obama can have Michelle Obama’s arms. That said, while you can’t control the parts of your body that like to hang on to fat, you can control your overall fitness, which can improve the way you look in sleeveless dresses. What that boils down to: Go ahead and focus on the areas you want to change, but work on the total picture, too.

Power Eats

Weight training ups your energy needs, says nutritionist Karen Ansel, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and co-author of *The Calendar Diet: A Month by Month Guide to Losing Weight While Living Your Life*. But that doesn’t mean you should down milkshakes post-workout. We asked Ansel for a sample daily menu.



BREAKFAST

Healthy egg sandwich:

One egg plus one egg white, scrambled in 1 tsp. canola oil, served on a sprouted-grain or whole-wheat English muffin with one slice each tomato and avocado. Add a half cup of berries, plus 8 oz. nonfat or 1 percent milk.



LUNCH

Power spinach salad:

Combine 2 cups spinach leaves, ½ cup diced red and yellow peppers, ¼ cup shredded carrots, ½ cup garbanzo beans, ½ cup diced skinless chicken breast and red onion slices with 2 Tbs. balsamic vinaigrette, plus 1 medium apple.



POST

WORKOUT SNACK

Plain non-fat Greek yogurt with a half of a banana, sliced.



DINNER

Shrimp edamame stir fry:

Stir fry six large peeled shrimp in 2 tsp. peanut oil along with ½ cup edamame, 1 cup diced bok choy, light soy sauce, fresh garlic and ginger, served over 1 cup cooked brown rice.



DESSERT

Two graham cracker squares topped with ¼ cup nonfat ricotta cheese and sprinkled with ¼ tsp. cinnamon sugar.