

Busting 4 Common Fitness Myths



September 5, 2016

Barbara Brody

You haven't taken a step aerobics class since 1998, and if you're old enough to have owned leg warmers and leotards those items are now buried in a closet somewhere, probably beneath an "Power Half Hour" VHS tape.

Fitness trends evolve, yet for some reason, some certain fitness **myths** just won't die. Read on and let us set the record straight about four of the most common:

Myth #1: The right exercise will burn fat from your belly (or thighs or arms or any other spot that's bugging you)

We wish there was a magic move that would blast fat from one trouble zone, but sadly, there isn't. "Spot reduction doesn't really work," says Tom Rifai, M.D., founder of Reality Meets Science and a fellow of the American College of Physicians. "If you want to get a six-pack, you're first going to have to decrease body fat overall, then work on toning that area," he explains.

That said, Rifai notes that working certain muscle groups can help you strengthen an area and shift the muscle-to-fat ratio so you might appear a little less flabby in that spot. Just don't expect a major transformation unless you're prepared to change your **diet** and shed fat from your entire frame.



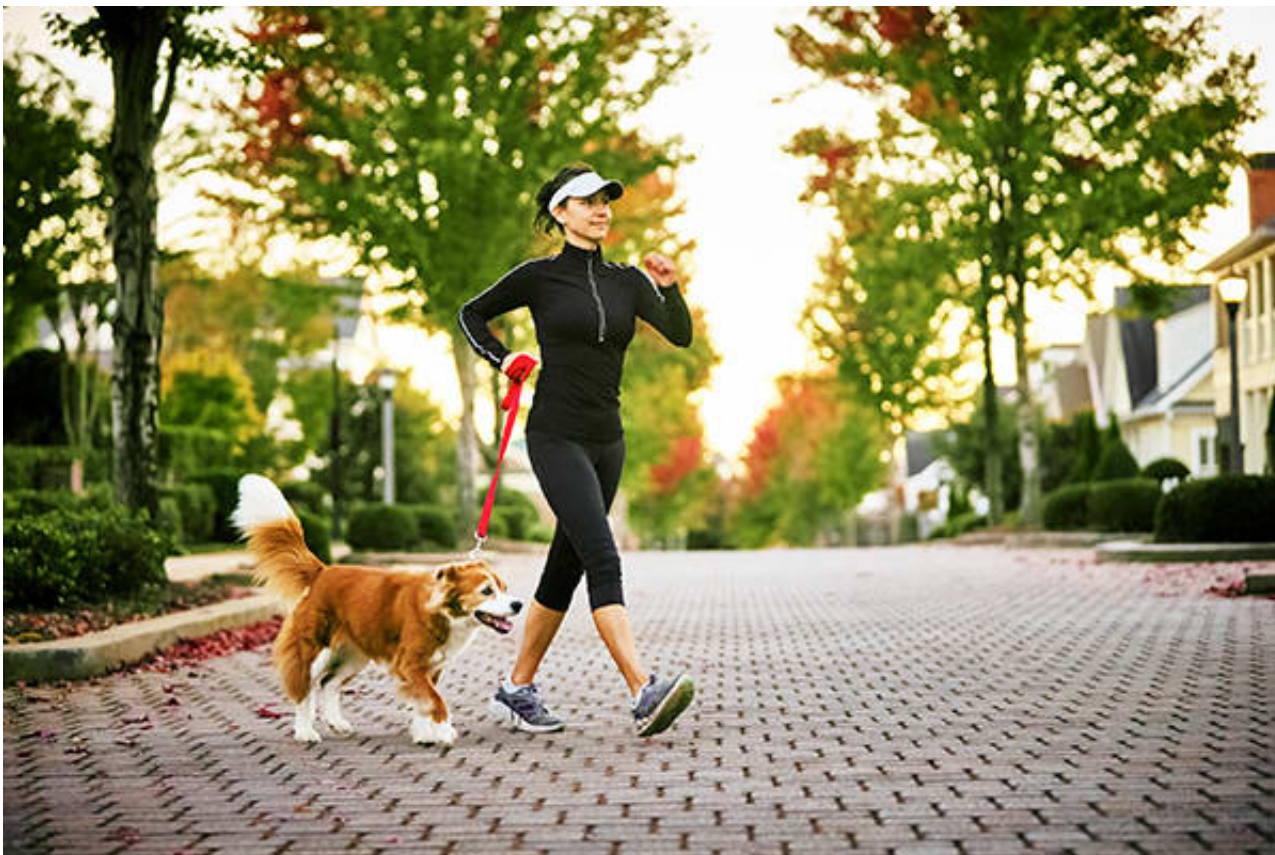
Myth #2: Walking 10,000 steps a day is the key to losing weight

Fitbit lovers, unite! Tracking your steps (and logging 10,000 a day) is generally considered a smart move for good health. But will it help you reach your weight loss goal?

It depends. Some people will slim down by taking this number of steps, as a **study** from the Brazilian Journal of Physical Therapy determined. But other research has found that **10,000 steps** is not

nearly enough for weight loss: For instance, a study on **postmenopausal** women found that 10,000 was “insufficient” for this age group, and that 12,500 was a better number to shoot for.

Saying everyone should get 10,000 steps is “a bit cookie-cutter,” says Rifai who says that there isn’t any one-size-fits-all prescription for fitness, since everyone’s body is different, and increasing your current activity level is what matters most. “You need to find your baseline and go from there,” says Rifai. Only averaging 5,000 steps a day? Up that number to 7,000-8,000 and you might start to see the pounds slowly come off. Already logging 10,000? Aim for 12,000 (or more) if you want the scale to go down.



Myth #3: Cut 3,500 calories and you'll lose one pound of fat

Losing weight might come down to math, but scientists are learning that it's much more than **calories in versus calories out**. And it turns out that one commonly-cited formula: 3,500 burned by exercise (or 3,500 fewer calories eaten) equals one

pound of fat lost-is pretty darn misleading. According to the **National Institutes of Health**, your age, gender, height, weight, body fat percentage, and resting metabolic rate all play an important role.

“No, you won't automatically lose a pound for each 3,500 calories cut,” says Rifai. “That might be true in the beginning, when you're just starting to lose weight, but your body adjusts and you need to monitor yourself as you go along.” He suggests making frequent adjustments to the amount you eat and exercise as the weeks go by and adding strength-training to your routine — increasing lean muscles helps to boost your metabolism so you burn more calories, even at rest. “Get ready for a journey,” says Rifai. “**Losing weight** is a marathon, not a sprint.”



Myth #4: Your body mass index (BMI) determines if you're carrying too much fat

“**BMI** is based only on your height and weight. It does not look at what your height and weight are made of,” says Rifai, noting that it’s impossible for that number to tell you your body fat percentage. BMI isn’t totally useless because it provides a quick and rough idea of whether your weight is healthy, but it’s not the final word.

Rifai says if your BMI falls in the upper end of the obese range, you will almost certainly have health problems unless you slim down. But if your BMI lands in the normal or overweight category (or even if it just touches the obese range) you might or might not have a problem, and he advises discussing your overall health with your doctor. Ask your doctor about your cholesterol, blood pressure, and to check your BMI and the size of your waist. A waist that’s larger than 35 inches for women or 40 inches for men spells trouble.

