



1600 landmark drive
cottage grove, wi 53527

toll-free 800.335.4348
fax 608.839.8731
www.visionfitness.com

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: August 17, 2009

Dear Editor,

As a lifelong fitness enthusiast, I am very concerned about the *Time Magazine* article on how exercise does not stimulate weight loss and may even cause weight gain, "Why Exercise Won't Make You Thin" (August 9, 2009)! What?! I am so concerned, in fact, that I am writing my first letter to the editor in hopes that our local papers will publish my response for the sake of public interest. I'm not alone. The International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association (IHRSA), the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), area health clubs, physicians, and fitness equipment companies nationwide are speaking out about this attack on exercise. If you are not familiar with the article, here is what it states in a nutshell (as summarized by the ACSM):

- Losing weight matters more than being aerobically fit in preventing heart disease.
- One cannot lose weight from exercise because exercise makes you hungrier—and willpower cannot conquer the hunger enough to make good food choices.
- Exercising 60 to 90 minutes most days of the week in order to lose weight (an ACSM recommendation) is unrealistic.
- Leisure-time physical activity—just moving around more during the day—is more effective for weight loss than dedicated exercise.
- Vigorous exercise depletes energy resources so much that it leads to overeating, i.e., weight gain.

Wow! Seems absurd, doesn't it? The author of the article does a pretty good spin on it, citing research and experts who support his theories above, which is what concerns me the most. To the reader who is always looking for excuses NOT to exercise, this gives them the ammo that they need, as disabling and inaccurate as it is. Readers are not getting the whole story. I can cite even more research that refutes what the article states. For instance, here is a quote directly from the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM):

"While diet alone can significantly reduce weight/fat, it may not be sufficient to maintain that loss, as research has shown that up to 50% of dieters losing weight will regain it. For this reason, it is proposed that diet and exercise be used in combination to achieve both loss and maintenance of excess fat loss.*"

It is true that exercise alone may not encourage weight loss, but that is because exercise results in more calorie-burning fat-free muscle mass, which weighs more than fat. Studies actually prove that resistance training just twice a week without a change in your diet can reduce body FAT (particularly in the abdominal region), though body WEIGHT may not change.* My husband, a longtime personal trainer, lays it out like this:

As a personal trainer, I always encourage my clients to stay off the scale. Most of the time, people become too worried about THE NUMBER they see every time they weigh themselves. They oftentimes weigh themselves daily and can become frustrated to the point of stopping their exercise altogether. So many factors affect your weight on a daily basis (primarily water intake and retention)! My objective is to help them feel better, help their clothes fit better, and help them achieve a healthy lifestyle, irrespective of what the scale might say.

Often when I am working with people, they will see their body weight go up before it will come down. This is because we are increasing their lean muscle which, in turn, helps them function better and burn more calories daily. We then focus on FAT loss through cardiovascular and strength training and proper eating habits.

It is true, exercise will make people hungry, but that is a good sign. When you become more active, hunger is the result of your metabolism speeding up (you are burning calories more rapidly). This improves the fat loss equation of more calories out than in. Conversely, on a day without exercise, one must consume fewer calories because fewer are going out. Our job as health professionals is to teach people how to make healthy food choices, so that they do not overindulge. It is a lifestyle change, not a quick fix. Once people experience how much better they feel and function by leading a healthy lifestyle, they get hooked in a hurry.

So, regardless of weight loss, exercise helps with fat loss by increasing calorie burn. It actually *gives* you energy, reduces stress (stress causes you to eat more, by the way), tones your muscles, and will ultimately improve your quality of life. Let's remember that health is more important than weight.

Kris Walter
Fitness Director and Personal Trainer, Lake Country Racquet and Athletic Club
Hartland, WI

Experts quoted in the *Time Magazine* article have even spoken out saying, basically, that their opinions were misrepresented. One in particular, Timothy Church, M.D., Ph.D., stated that weight maintenance should have been discussed in the article, "Virtually all people who lose weight and keep it off are exercising to maintain [the lower] weight." He goes on to say that "studies have shown that kids are not necessarily more active after school [so in-school Phys. Ed. is needed]," and "exercise and diet go together."

If what you take from the *Time Magazine* article is that nutrition is extremely important in weight loss, and you should stop treating yourself to a Big Mac after every half hour run, then I fully support it. However, the information will almost certainly be misinterpreted by the general public. Exercise has clear and well-documented benefits that should not be underestimated. Thus, I feel it our duty to ensure that the facts from ACSM, NASM, etc., get out.

Here's to your health,

Christa Walter
Avid runner and cyclist, wife of a personal trainer, mother of twins, and employee of Johnson Health Tech NA in Cottage Grove, WI

***Research sources provided by NASM in their OPT™ for Fat Loss report:**

American College of Sports Medicine. ACSM position stand on the appropriate strategies for weight loss and prevention of weight gain for adults. *Med Sci Sports Exerc* 2001;33(12):2145-56.

Donnelly JE, Smith B, Jacobsen DJ, Kirk E, Dubose K, Hyder M, Bailey B, Washburn R. The role of exercise for weight loss and maintenance. *Best Pract Res Clin Gastroenterol* 2004;18(6):1009-29.

Ibanez J, Izquierdo M, Arguelles I, Forga L, Larrion JL, Garcia-Unciti M, Idoate F, Gorostiaga EM. Twice-weekly progressive resistance training decreases abdominal fat and improves insulin sensitivity in older men with type 2 diabetes. *Diabetes Care* 2005;28(3):662-7.

Ross R, Dagnone D, Jones PJ, Smith H, Paddags A, Hudson R, Janssen I. Reduction in obesity and related comorbid conditions after diet-induced weight loss or exercise-induced weight loss in men. A randomized, controlled trial. *Ann Intern Med.* 2000 Jul 18;133(2):92-103.

Ozcelik O, Dogan H, Celik H, Ayar A, Serhatlioglu S, Kelestimur H. Effects of different weight loss protocols on serum leptin levels in obese females. *Physiol Res* 2005;54(3):217-7.