

TRAINING WOMEN

By Michelle Drielsma



The aerobic exercise myth. Ever noticed the weights room is stereotypically the “male” section, the cardio machine and aerobics room is the “female” section?? When asked about this phenomenon, women always answer with; “I’ve heard I need to do lots of cardio to lose weight”, and “I don’t want to get bulky”.

Too much aerobic exercise, coupled with poor nutritional habits have been major contributors in the development of osteoporosis and rounded spines. Initially, most people will have a small to moderate weight loss with aerobic exercise. Thereafter their bodies adapt, becoming more efficient and so less calories are burnt. So why are distance runners so skinny?? Lots of aerobic exercise stimulates the production of stress hormones (cortisol) which are catabolic in nature (they are tissue breakdown hormones). Your body perceives itself as under a stressful situation, and these hormones oppose the development of muscle mass, in fact with chronic exposure they breakdown muscle tissue, as well as other tissues including bone. Stress hormones also tell your body to hold onto the fat stores available, just in case that lion comes again and you’ll be running for days! The body is swept into a sympathetic (flight-or-fight) state, whereby blood is shunted away from the internal organs to the peripheral muscles in preparation for you to take action (fight or flee from

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danger). Chronic or long term exposure to these stress hormones compromises your tissue building and repair, digestion, production of vital hormones and many other parasympathetic functions which are essential for our survival. Disorders destined to develop are likely to include diabetes, osteoporosis, infertility, menstrual problems, digestive disorders, heart disorders and impaired immune function.

Intense short bouts of exercise or interval training actually elevates the metabolism. Sprinters have the best bodies in the industry, ripped muscles and hardly any body fat. A typical long distance runner will on average have a higher percentage of body fat than a sprinter. Aerobic exercise stimulates the metabolism up to 12 hours after exercise, high intensity resistance exercise stimulates the metabolism up to 48 hours (and in some cases up to 72 hours!). Alternate aerobic with resistance training sessions to keep your body guessing, making it hard for the body to adapt. Use compound, free weight exercises requiring recruitment of stabiliser muscles, such as the squat or lunge.

EXERCISE MACHINES VERSUS GOOD OLD-FASHIONED FREE WEIGHT TRAINING

Machines have a guided resistance and most often require a seated position, eliminating the need to recruit the stabiliser or postural mechanisms of the body. People who exercise on machines can then get away with not recruiting their stabilisers and inner unit (including the TVA) and thereby develop a faulty muscle recruitment pattern. Free weight or body-resistance exercises with good technique are key here, coupled with a core and trunk conditioning program. So firstly, when speaking of exercise machines there is hardly any carry-over to functional movement, and secondly they provide such isolation of muscles that there is minimal caloric expenditure compared to more functional compound leg exercises.

WILL I DEVELOP BULKY MUSCLES??

No need for concern in this area. Females naturally have much lower levels of testosterone, a muscle-building hormone. Female bodybuilders spend somewhere between 3 – 5 hours a day on a specific hypertrophy program (5-10 sets per ex), not to mention the challenge for women to gain large amounts of muscle, and so many female bodybuilders turning to anabolic steroids for assistance.

KNEE JOINT CONSIDERATIONS

Collectively speaking, inherent in women's structural anatomy is a greater 'Q' angle, or angle from outer hip bone to knee, which has been associated with greater prevalence of non-contact anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries. The greater 'Q' angle, coupled with a wider pelvis can lead to medial rotational instability of the leg, which occurs more frequently in women than in men. So all this means that the best cure is a well designed functional exercise program with attention given to core and hip stabilisers.



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A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a white tank top and white shorts, is holding a blue resistance band. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is plain white.

A NOTE ABOUT THE CORE..

A key muscle to restore and maintain function is the transverse abdominis (TVA). The TVA, through its connection to the thoracolumbar fascia, has a relationship with the diaphragm, the deep stabilisers of the spine and the pelvic floor, as well as the hamstrings and the peroneal muscles of the lower leg and foot. By improving TVA function, the exerciser increases stability of the spine, pelvis and legs. TVA function is frequently dysfunctional after childbearing, caesarean section or hysterectomy. A TVA can be inhibited by inflammation and pain, as associated with food intolerances and allergies, digestive problems and parasite or fungal infections. Consult with a CHEK Holistic Lifestyle Coach or CHEK Practitioner trained in identifying this association and guide you towards removing this major roadblock to achieving your goals.

FOR MY TUMMY (FAT....)?

We see people overdoing the crunch exercise (where the trunk only moves through a limited 30-degree range of motion), with little results and maybe even developing back pain. Also, too much trunk flexion and not enough trunk and hip extension exercises commonly results in poor posture and impaired breathing patterns (depressed sternum and first rib angle, shortened neck flexors, tight upper abdominals). So what can you do? Firstly, an assessment by your exercise professional is always recommended before prescribing any movement. First you'll want your TVA and lower abdominals functional and thereafter you may be able to extend over a Swiss Ball or BOSU (for greater range of motion training, developing the muscle fibers to their potential).

For body fat, the major thing is look at your nutritional and lifestyle factors. Find a qualified practitioner that can help determine how internally challenged your body is and how much exercise is safe and effective.

"Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime." Learn how to move effectively and regain your birthright to functional movement, slim bodies and health. Please send any queries (or abuse) to michelle@studioevolve.com.au. **ufm**