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perfect fit

# Hit or myth?

Here are a few fitness myths and facts

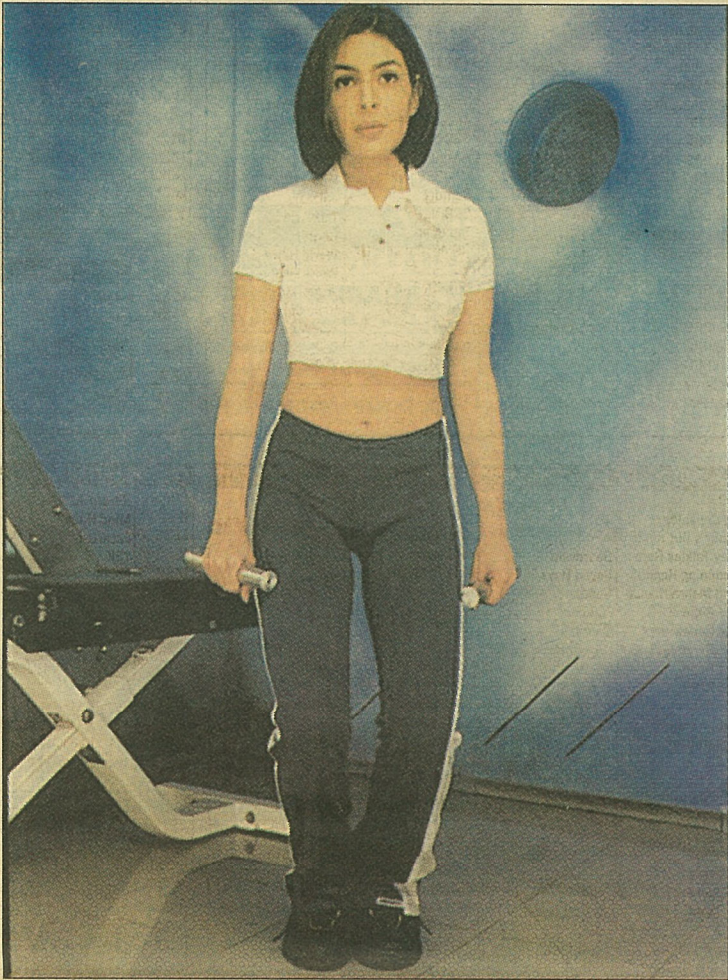


Figure 1: Doing a variation of a squat for the lower body

PICS: RAM BHERWANI

**T**HERE are so many myths and foggy clouds of grey floating around in the fitness industry today that cloud a consumer's vision and naturally hamper his or her ability to reach optimum potential levels of fitness. Through this article, I'm hoping to set some of these notions right. You may have heard of a few of the following, and possibly fallen prey to some yourself. Do reflect, as you read on. Reading without reflecting, is like eating without digesting.

**Myth: The more I sweat, the more fat I burn.**

**Fact:** Not true. Water loss is not fat loss, and sweat is only water loss! Burning fat and sweating often go hand in hand, and are therefore confused as being one and the same thing. However, excessive water loss through sweat can be very harmful, as it can lead to dehydration, heat exhaustion and even heat strokes in extreme cases. Water loss hampers the ability to continue any form of cardiovascular exercise as the body overheats and is unable to effectively get rid of this heat build-up.

Let me explain via an analogy. For our purpose, imagine a car to be the human body. The radiator in a car can be compared to our water stores, while the fuel tank can be related to our fat stores.

When the radiator is low on water, the car overheats and performance is impaired. When the radiator is completely out of water, the car will stall. This has nothing whatsoever to do with the fuel tank (burning fat, in our case). So, to confuse our fuel tank (fat stores) with our radiator (water stores) would be absurd.

The myth of steam rooms are based on the same theory. After sweating it out in a steam room, your inches and weight will have certainly dropped, but this loss is only water loss, not fat loss, and it's only temporary. As soon as you drink water again, it's going to go straight back to where it came from, and weight and

inch-wise, you'll be back to where you started! While saunas and steam rooms have other health benefits, fat loss certainly isn't one of them. To facilitate fat loss, one must drink water before, during and after exercise to remain well hydrated, or else you'll just end up exhausted and unable to continue with your exercise programme.

**Myth: Vibrating machines and belts will help me break down my fat.**

**Fact:** Besides jiggling you around and possibly soothing and relaxing you, vibrating belts and machines don't do anything for you. In fact, using them poses a potential risk of injury. This claim that vibrating belts 'break up fat' has no basis in fact! The belts might cause temporary water loss from the area or compress the tissues, so the waistline looks thinner for a while. However, upon water consumption, the figure soon returns to normal.

**Myth: Electrical muscle stimulators will get me to lose fat and inches immediately!**

**Fact:** Electrical muscle stimulators, when placed on specific muscle groups, discharge a small electrical current, causing the muscle to contract. While these devices might help in injury rehabilitation, they don't do anything for loss of body fat/inches. Due to the stimuli, temporarily the muscles contract, but relax soon after, having one return back to square one.

**Myth: It can't be harmful or have any side effects as it's herbal and therefore totally natural; there are no chemicals or drugs in it (in reference to certain diet pills, fat burners and appetite suppressants)**

**Fact:** Totally natural? So is snake venom and poison ivy! Just because it's not man-made and found in nature's bounty, doesn't mean it isn't harmful! Don't kid yourself! Take a closer look!

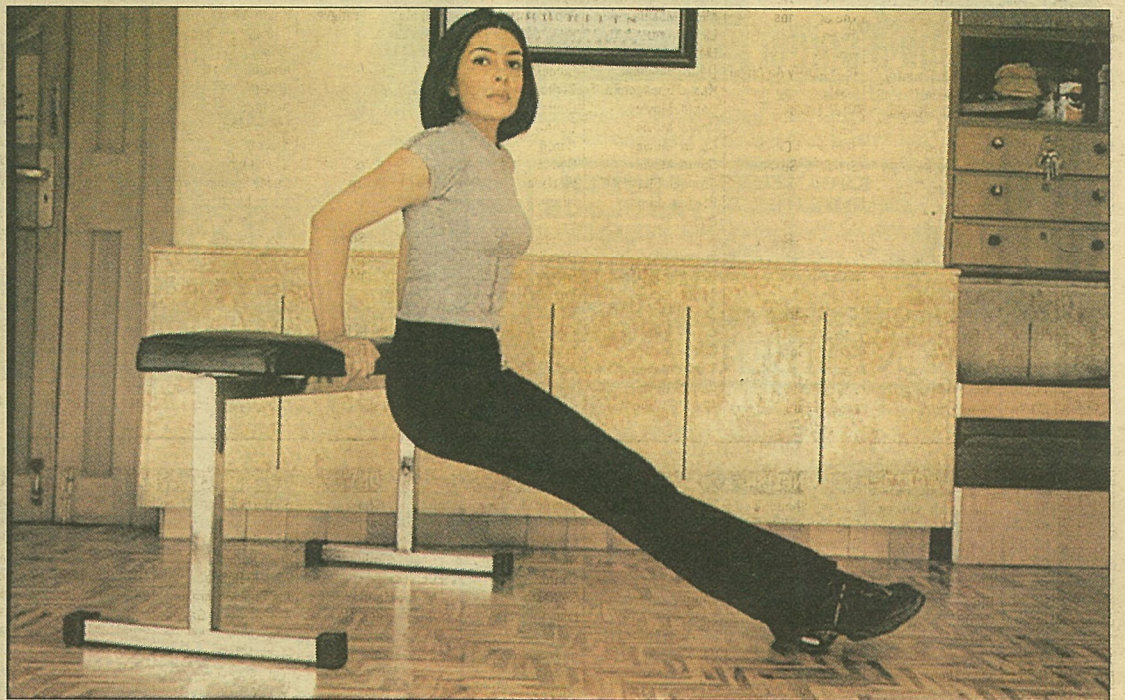


Figure 2: Demonstrating tricep dips for the muscles in the back of the upper arm

**Myth: Exercise is one sure way to lose all the excess fat and weight that you want.**

**Fact:** Many factors such as genetics, body type or frame, dietary habits and intake, etc, influence weight and fat loss. There is a wide variation in how different people respond to the same training programme. Each person's development of strength and endurance may vastly vary from the next. All people will not lose the same amount of fat and weight while on the same programme. So it's important not to try and compete with anyone else. Work at being the best that you can be.

**Myth: The harder I work, the more fat I'll burn.**

**Fact:** Sorry, but if you've been working yourself to the bone, you aren't burning fat. For fat loss, one must stick to working out at moderate intensities for approximately 30-40 minutes, and not at a very high intensity. In other words, one must remain in one's fat burning zone/target heart rate/training zone. This can be done in various ways. Keeping a tab on your pulse is one way of doing it. Two common pulse sites are the carotid artery on the neck, and the radial artery on the wrist. Ideally, each individual's target heart rate/training zone ought to be worked out separately, taking into consideration factors like age, fitness levels, goals and health limitations.

Without this range and the knowledge of how to calculate and implement it, one may be burning other sources of energy like glycogen, quick energy, etc, rather than mainly stored body fats. So, if fat and inch loss is a goal, you would be wasting a lot of time, effort, and possibly money, by overworking, and only end up being very disappointed.

**Myth: At the end of my exercise programme, I'll have lost a lot of weight!**

**Fact:** Not necessarily! The best thing to do is to combine cardiovascular fitness with muscle toning. In other words, to burn fat and to tone up. When we're working in a cardiovascular way, we're burning fat and inches and are going down on the weighing scales. Great! However, when toning, muscles become heavier and denser (but more compact) than flab is. So, during this segment, while the inches and fat remain low, weight goes up.

Well, then why not just skip the

muscle tone segment and work on the fat loss bit? That way, one can keep the fat, inches and weight down, right? Right. However, without some degree of muscle tone, visual appeal is greatly reduced. We've all come across women who've lost loads of weight and inches, but yet seem rather shapeless. They still have the extra flab (but not the extra inches) hanging around where they least want it — typically around the lower belly, the inner and outer thighs, triceps or the back of the upper arms, etc.

That's why building up on muscle tone is important. It's also crucial in keeping the skeletal system well supported and strong. In conclusion, getting rid of this segment is just not advisable.

**Myth: Exercise is responsible for the appearance of varicose veins.**

**Fact:** Quite the contrary, actually! Exercise can improve the condition. Cardio workouts will increase cardiac and respiratory suction action. Weight or strength training also results in improved pumping action. Including stretches for the lower limbs will help the peripheral veins.

**Myth: Once I stop working out, I'll end up putting on double the weight I began with!**

**Fact:** Not true! What will happen is that your body composition will change. In other words, when one is working out, the fat vs muscle ratio improves.

Stored body fat decreases, while muscle tone increases. When one discontinues any form of exercise, fat loss is frozen, and while your inches remain the same, but muscle tone decreases.

That's the way it is with muscle - you either use it, or lose it! In fact, one's weight on the weighing scales will drop as muscle tone decreases since muscle is heavier and denser than fat. This is provided your dietary habits remain reasonable. If not, get ready to watch all that hard work go down the drain! So eat sensibly - the gates of paradise are narrow!

**Myth: Weight training makes women look muscle-bound and manly.**

**Fact:** Within limits, weight training adds to feminine grace and appeal. It's very hard for women to become bulky and muscle-bound as females lack the male muscle building hormone, testosterone. To develop the

sort of bodies one sees in *Muscle & Fitness* magazine, women would have to take steroids. In fact, weight and resistance training helps you get rid of unwanted fat, and fast.

This is so as muscles burn more calories, both at rest and at work. So the more muscle mass you have, the more calories you will burn. You can raise your metabolism by as much as 15-18 per cent!

**Myth: Diet pills that suppress the appetite is one sure way of knocking those extra kilos off.**

**Fact:** These ought to be avoided entirely. They usually contain a stimulant such as amphetamine. Firstly, the effect of the drug is temporary, and so the rate of fat/weight reduction tapers off with time. Secondly, these can cause insomnia, high blood pressure, dizziness and headaches. They are very addictive as well.

**Myth: You shouldn't exercise while you have your periods.**

**Fact:** Being physically active is the most natural thing in the world. So is having your periods (for about 50 per cent of our population). Don't make a mental issue of a non-issue. It's perfectly all right to exercise at this time. In fact, if you're the sort of person who has mild pain or discomfort during your period, you'll find that exercise gets rid of that, either entirely, or to a large degree.

If however you are subject to intense pain and discomfort, you might want to skip your workout on the first or second day.

Just avoid checking your weight and measurements at this time, as we all start retaining water starting from about a week to ten days prior to our periods, right through the same. Therefore if you've recorded your progress at this time, it is bound to be inaccurate as both your weight and inches are going to be higher than usual.

So while you're on the right track, don't start off with all the wrong ideas!

(For a large variety of workouts or gym sessions, contact the columnist's fitness centre, Body Art, at 380-2602 and 380-5929)

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