

Understanding balance of exercise, strength

While big chunks of America's population continue to be ravaged by obesity, causing other problems such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, there are many millions who choose to prevent those conditions by exercising regularly.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently estimated that only 20 percent of us get the recommended amount of daily exercise.

Given our diet and lifestyles, it's no wonder that some of our first-world diseases have reached epidemic proportions.

Let's be clear: This is your health. There is nothing more important. If you don't have good health, you will eventually die, preventing you from doing everything else, from spending time with your loved ones to enjoying your money.

If you're going to exercise — which I applaud — I would warn that you will do more harm than good if you've bought into some of the myths and "conventional wisdom" that is, in fact, simply wrong.

Here are some of those misconceptions:

1. More exercise is always bet-

ter. Everyone wants more muscle and less fat. Conventional wisdom says that hours and hours of exercise will achieve those results. That's completely wrong. Overkill is not only unnecessary, it can be counterproductive. You'll get the best results with a strength-training regimen, tailored to meet your needs, which can be accomplished in three to four hours per week.

2. More cardio is better than lifting. For all you chronic dieters and cardio enthusiasts out there trying to shed fat, the right strength-training program can boost your metabolism and help burn off more fat. By increasing lean muscle mass, you will increase your basal metabolic rate, BMR. Activated, contracting muscles are the body's furnace. Excessive cardio and dieting can eat muscle tissue away, compromising this furnace.

3. Women: "But I don't want to look like a man." Females who lift weights won't look like men; they do not have the hormonal support to pile on a significant amount of muscle mass. Female lifters will, however, assume a shapelier figure. In fact, 99.99 percent of men older than 30 do not have the natural hormonal support to do so either.

4. You need to buy "product X."

We live in a very money-based culture, so much so that we often place the almighty dollar above health. Get out of this mindset, at least regarding exercise. What counts for building muscle includes determination, intensity, consistency and safety. If you think buying the most expensive formula, training uniform or machine is necessary for reaching your potential, you're wrong. Machines often compromise the intensity required for the body you desire.

5. CrossFit is a good exercise program. If you want to build muscle, then CrossFit has many problems. First, it encourages ballistic movements from novice lifters, and since the program's rise in popularity, there has been a marked increase in injury rates, which can set fitness goals back by many months. Second, as mentioned above, you don't need to pound the body five times a week; you may increase endurance and lose fat, but you'll also lose muscle. CrossFit encourages overtraining and has been linked to increased incidents of rhabdomyolysis, or rhabdo, which is the breakdown of muscle tissue that leads to the release of muscle fiber contents into the blood. Rhabdo can cause kidney damage. Third, the creators of CrossFit have encouraged the Paleo Diet, a low-insulin diet. Insulin is a necessary part of building muscle.

(About the writer: Dr. Brett Osborn is a New York University-trained, board-certified neurological surgeon with a secondary certification in anti-aging and regenerative medicine. He holds a CSCS honorarium from the National Strength and Conditioning Association. Osborn specializes in scientifically based nutrition and exercise as a means to achieve optimal health and preventing disease.)

