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# Thoughts on fitness myths

■ BY MATT BRZYCKI

Like most people, I have plenty of opinions. And when it comes to fitness, I'm all too eager to offer my thoughts.

Having worked in fitness centers and weight rooms on a regular basis since 1983, I've heard my share of "advice" and seen it in action. Here are some random thoughts that I have on a variety of those topics:



Matt Brzycki

## Evening Eating

Having a bite to eat after a certain time of the day won't automatically make you gain weight. Surely you've heard that you shouldn't eat after a designated time such as 6 p.m. Does this mean that if you eat one minute later, you'll gain weight. Yeah, sure. And if you don't get home by midnight, you'll turn into a pumpkin.

The most important thing that determines whether or not you gain (or lose) weight is the number of calories that you consume and expend – not the time of the day.

## Lat Pulldown

Using a wide grip during the lat pulldown doesn't build a wide back. Your potential for muscular development is based primarily on your genetics (or inherited characteristics). You cannot manipulate your genetics by simply changing the grip that you use during an exercise.

If anything, a wider grip actually makes the lat pulldown less effective. Try this: Take an empty bar and hold it near the upper part of your chest (near your collarbones) with your hands spaced far apart. While standing in front of a mirror, press the bar overhead. Note the distance that the bar traveled vertically. Now, move your hands a bit closer together and try it again. You'll find that the narrower grip allowed the bar to travel a greater distance. Being able to move the bar a greater distance means that there's a greater range of motion

around the shoulder and elbow joints. The greater range of motion translates into a greater involvement of the targeted muscles. As a rule of thumb, the grip in the lat pull-down should be slightly wider than shoulder-width apart.

## Neck Training

In my opinion, everyone should do neck training at least once or twice a week. Think about it: The most important muscles – at least as it pertains to catastrophic injury – are those that surround your cervical spine or neck. Those muscles are extremely important in preventing injury during various combative sports such as football, rugby, boxing, judo and wrestling.

What if you don't participate in those activities? Well, did you ever have to respond to a hostage standoff wearing a ballistic helmet? Or did you ever have to respond to a civil disturbance wearing a riot helmet? Yeah, the helmets only weigh a few pounds but in a prolonged op, they start to feel heavier; the more your neck fatigues, the heavier the helmet feels. And fatigue increases the potential for poor reactions and bad decisions.

## Overweight/Obese Americans

The number of Americans who are said to be overweight or obese is exaggerated. The estimates that we keep hearing are that about two-thirds of American adults are overweight and half of those are obese. Did you ever wonder how those statistics were derived? Obviously, it's not from body-composition analyses of the roughly 200 million adults in this country. The truth is that the numbers were extrapolated from the self-reported heights and weights of about 32,000 adults. The heights and weights were used to calculate what's known as the "Body-Mass Index" (or BMI).

But using the BMI to define being overweight or obese can be grossly misleading, especially with athletic populations. The reason is that when you use BMI, no consideration is given as to

whether the weight is fat or muscle. For example, an individual who is 5'10" and weighs 205 pounds is – based on BMI – less than five pounds away from being categorized as obese. Not overweight but obese. Now, here's the kicker: This happens to be the height and weight of Tiki Barber, the fleet running back of the New York Giants who rushed for a team-record 1,860 yards in 2005. A quick glance at this athlete would reveal that he's nowhere near being obese. In fact, his percentage of body fat is undoubtedly in the single digits.

If you're not a Giants fan, this should hit a little closer to home: A study found that based on height and weight, the average soldier in the U. S. Special Forces is overweight. Does anyone really think that the elite soldiers of our country are overweight? I can't comment on the current MREs but when I was a Marine in the mid-to-late 1970s, most of the C-rats didn't exactly inspire overeating. Hey, eating a can of beans and weenies was better than starving... but not by much.

Anyway, the fact is that based on height and weight, most competitive athletes – and many of you who are reading this article – are considered overweight or obese even though their percentage of body fat is perfectly acceptable. And they'd be counted as among the 133.3 million adult Americans or so who are overweight or obese. I'm not saying that weight isn't a problem in the United States; just that the numbers of people who are classified as overweight or obese are inflated.

## Overuse Injuries

Most people do far too many exercises for the front part of their shoulder which predisposes them to injuries. It's often assumed that the front raise is only exercise that involves the front part of the shoulder. As a rule of thumb, however, any exercise for the torso in which you push a weight involves the front part of your shoulder. This includes the bench press, incline press, decline press, dip, push-up, overhead (or seated) press, bent-arm fly and pec deck. Think about how many sets and reps you do that

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create and maintain a centralized data base of digital information stored by all Alcotest 7110s throughout the State. This data should be uploaded, either daily or weekly, by a modem or internet connection to a central State location and maintained for at least ten years."

**8. Non-Operator Dependent**

"Unlike the Breathalyzer, the Alcotest 7110 is not operator dependent. \*\*\* With the Alcotest 7110, a permanent record, the AIR, is printed out and a copy given to the suspect after the test is completed. \*\*\* The objectivity of the Alcotest 7110 compared to the Breathalyzer is a considerable advantage: it combines both accuracy, contemporary documentation of the result, and elimination of the ability of the operator to falsify or exaggerate the test outcome. This independence from potential operator influence and a permanent machine-printed record are decided advantages over the Breathalyzer."

**9. Breath Temperature Sensor**

"Most breath analyzers used in the United States operate on the assumption that the temperature of an expired breath sample is 34 degrees C. Recent scientific research supports the proposition that the temperature of an expired breath sample is actually almost 35 degrees C. For each degree above 34 degrees C, breath tests will increase BAC results by 6.58 percent. While the relevant scientific community at this time does not generally accept breath temperature monitoring as necessary, this court finds that the technology to control this variable is accurate and readily available. \*\*\* We strongly recommend that New Jersey employ Draeger's breath temperature sensor. Unless such breath temperature sensing is implemented, all breath test results should be reduced downward by 6.58 percent, as done currently in Alabama. This will serve to reduce the overall margin of error from the Alcotest 7110 and increase confidence in the reported BAC as more accurate to support a finding of guilt. \*\*\*"

**10. Tolerances for the Two Breath Tests**

"The two breath samples when tested must be within a certain tolerance of each other for the breath test to be considered reliable. \*\*\* We now recommend a tolerance of plus or minus .005 or plus or minus 5 percent (10 percent overall) of the mean of the four readings (two EC and two IR) whichever is greater. \*\*\* Of course, only the lowest of the four readings will be admitted in evidence, if all are within this tolerance range."

**Conclusion**

"[T]he Alcotest 7110, NJ 3.11 version is and has been scientifically reliable, under the clear and convincing evidence standard, when the test protocol is carefully followed by the operator and the instrument is functioning properly. \*\*\* Incorporation of the dual IR and EC technologies enhances analytical accuracy for alcohol (ethanol) and provides reassurance of a quality result. We are convinced that the Alcotest 7110 is the state-of-the-art technology available and if implemented with our suggestions will provide suspects and the general public the best possible assurance for the protection of individual rights and for public safety."

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involve the front part of your shoulder. Now think about how many sets and reps you do that involve the back part of your shoulder. Are both parts of your shoulder receiving a near-equal amount of attention? If not, you're increasing your chances of having a shoulder problem.

**Weightlifting Belts**

There's little need for most people to wear weightlifting belts in the weight room. Ask people why they wear lifting belts and most of them would probably say that they do so to prevent injury.

If you're doing an exercise in which you feel that you have to wear a lifting belt to reduce your risk of getting hurt then do yourself a big favor and ditch that exercise. There's no reason whatsoever for you to do any exercise in which the risks outweigh the benefits. And while on the subject, there's no scientific support that the use of lifting belts improves performance in strength/fitness applications.

**The Bottom Line**

There's no escaping the vast amount of information that we receive from a variety of sources on fitness. While the information is usually well intended, it's often ill advised. So before you employ any "advice" on fitness, give the concept some critical thought.

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