

# fitness

## MANAGEMENT

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SEPTEMBER 2007

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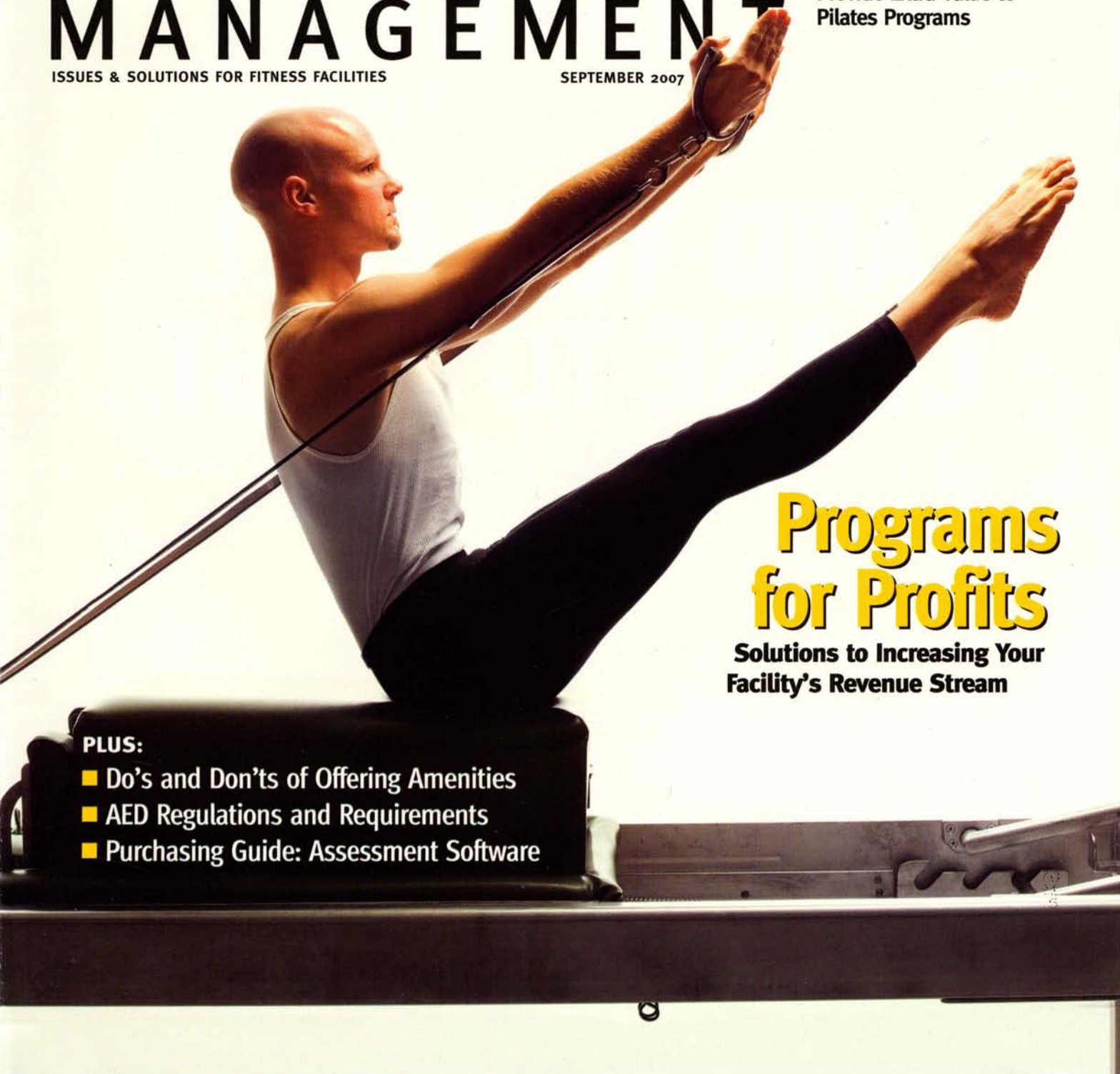
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## Do lifting belts reduce injury or improve performance?

The use of lifting belts is fairly common. According to one survey, lifting belts were worn by 27 percent of the members of a fitness center. More-

over, 90 percent of the individuals who wore lifting belts said that they did so to prevent injury; and 22 percent wore lifting belts to improve performance.

But are these beliefs valid?

To date, no studies have looked at the effect of lifting belts on the incidence of injuries during strength/fitness applications. However, several studies have shown that performing the barbell squat and deadlift while wearing a lifting belt increases interabdominal pressure (IAP). Increased IAP is thought to stabilize the spine and decrease compressive forces. In addition, one study found that the use of lifting belts produced less spinal shrinkage when performing the deadlift (eight sets of 20 repetitions with 22 pounds).

Interestingly, no studies have looked at the effect of lifting belts on the ability to “perform” in strength/fitness applications. As a result, there’s no scientific support that the use of lifting belts improves performance.

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## Does red wine increase longevity?

For years, it has been thought that drinking red wine can provide several health benefits, such as a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. More recently, it was widely reported that red wine might increase lifespan.

In the study that spawned the headlines, mice were divided into three groups: One group ate a standard diet, another group ate a high-calorie diet (60 percent of the calories from fat) and the third group ate the same high-calorie diet with a daily dose of resveratrol — a chemical found in red wine. The researchers estimated that resveratrol reduced the risk of death from the high-calorie diet by 31 percent. The study also found that resveratrol shifted numerous health markers of the mice on the high-calorie diet toward that of the mice on the standard diet. This has led some to believe that resveratrol might be an effective tool in combating obesity. While this is certainly intriguing, there is no scientific evidence that resveratrol produces the same effects in humans. Plus, there

are no data on its long-term safety.

Something else to consider is that, in order to get the same relative amount of resveratrol as the mice, one scientist estimated that a human would have to consume 300 glasses of red wine each day. Finally, it must be noted that several of the researchers in this study had financial interests in its outcome.

## Are glucosamine and chondroitin effective for treating osteoarthritis?

Glucosamine and chondroitin are natural substances that are found in cartilage. It's believed that glucosamine inhibits inflammation and stimulates the growth of cartilage, while chondroitin gives cartilage strength and resilience. As a result, these two substances have been promoted as viable treatments for osteoarthritis.

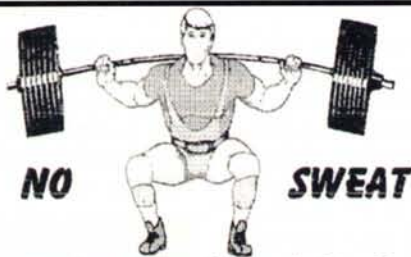
Research has found that glucosamine and chondroitin decrease pain more than a placebo. However, most of the studies were of short

duration (less than about four weeks). Also, numerous studies were of low quality — many were sponsored in some manner by a product manufacturer. Indeed, the two longest studies to date were both funded by a pharmaceutical company, and had employees from the company listed as co-authors.

Many studies have reported a high percentage of side-effects from glucosamine. In most of the studies, though, the rate of side-effects in those who used glucosamine wasn't significantly greater than those who used a placebo. The most prevalent side-effects were abdominal pain, diarrhea, headaches and increased blood pressure.

Bottom line: Glucosamine and chondroitin have shown some promise in combating osteoarthritis, and appear to be relatively safe, but at this point, the research on these two substances needs to be more convincing. **FM**

Matt Brzycki is assistant director of campus recreation, fitness at Princeton University, Princeton, N.J. He has more than 24 years of experience at the collegiate level and has authored, co-authored or edited 16 books.



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