

# BUSTED: 10 OF THE BIGGEST HEALTH MYTHS

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**Are you working out at the wrong time? Is breakfast actually important? Can lifting weights make you lean? Is raw food healthier? And should you really aim for 10,000 steps a day? We've dug deep into the research to separate the facts from fiction ...**



In the pursuit of good health and fitness, chances are you've faced conflicting advice, confusing recommendations and endless research revealing how different actions affect your health. To make your life easy, we've unpicked some of the most common misconceptions and matched them up with the latest findings, so you can adopt science-backed healthy habits to set you up for a bright future.

## **Morning workouts are best**

While working out in the morning offers many benefits, there are also many advantages that come from exercising later in the day – and no credible scientific evidence to show one time is better than the other. Australian researchers found that some inactive people who introduce exercise in the afternoon enjoy more significant health benefits than those who do morning workouts. But for the majority of us, the recommendation is to work-out whenever fits most conveniently with your schedule, as that is what will ensure consistency. Bryce Hastings, Les Mills Head of Research, says: “While there's a chance your body will burn calories differently at different times of the day, these differences will be minimal compared to the benefit of exercising regularly. How much you benefit from exercise is closely linked to the amount of consistent physical activity you do.”

[Learn more about the ideal time to work out.](#)

## High-intensity interval training (HIIT) is only for fit, young people

HIIT is hard, fast and powerful, a style of training often favored by youthful exercisers and those who are super fit. But that doesn't mean exercisers of all ages and fitness levels can't also benefit. A [large and lengthy study](#) involving seniors doing different types of exercise found that those who did two HIIT workouts a week for five years had the most dramatic effect on quality of life and fitness levels. And HIIT can also help make older exercisers younger! A [comprehensive study](#) of both athletes and sedentary men revealed that a man in his late 60s can cut his biological age by 20 years – simply by following a series of 20-minute HIIT cycle workouts.

Professional sports and fitness research scientist, Dr. Jinger Gottschall, does caution that, regardless of age, if you're totally new to exercise then jumping head-first into HIIT is almost definitely a bad idea. She recommends first getting your body used to exercise, with 6-12 weeks of consistent moderate-intensity exercise including strength, cardio and core/flexibility training each week.

[Discover the life-saving benefits of HIIT](#)

## Breakfast is the most important meal of the day

Despite being touted as the 'most important meal of the day', many people now choose to skip breakfast as fasting becomes more popular. While there's little evidence to show the smartest approach, [researchers have found](#) those who eat breakfast are likely to consume more calories overall and have a greater body weight (although even these researchers say the findings should be reviewed with caution). Whether you eat breakfast or not is a matter of personal preference. However, one of the best arguments in favor of eating breakfast, is that it's a good opportunity to fuel your body with nutritious food. Breakfast is a meal that typically lets us get in some fiber, in the form of whole grains from bread and cereal, or fruit and vegetables. Same goes for protein, maybe in the form of eggs, milk, or yogurt. If we don't eat breakfast, we have one less meal in which to get the nutrition we need for our day.

[Fitness pros share their breakfast habits.](#)

## Women get big and bulky lifting weights

"Women often have a misguided perception that strength training will make them look bulky. But it won't!" says Erin Maw, Les Mills Presenter and creator of the Strength Development program. "When people have extreme gains and look remarkably muscly, it's because they combined a number of factors; nutrition, supplements and really specific and strategic training. Strength training will make you strong, it will make you powerful, but resistance workouts alone won't build a bulky body." [Research shows](#) high repetition strength training generates a lactate response, a subsequent increase in growth hormone, and a long-term calorie burn effect that helps you build strength without bulk.

[Should you be lifting more? See this checklist.](#)

## A raw food diet will improve your health

Pack your diet with raw, whole, unprocessed foods and you'll enjoy a wealth of health benefits. But relying solely on a raw diet could leave you short of essential nutrients – it can be tough to get sufficient protein, iron and omega-3s if you're relying on raw food alone. It's also worth noting that just because something is raw, wheat-free, dairy-free and sugar-free, this doesn't make it a health food. Raw sweet treats can be very energy-dense, usually because they're based on nuts, honey, dried fruit and coconut. They can also cause havoc for people who suffer from irritable bowel syndrome.

[Find out how to make raw food work for you.](#)

### **10,000 steps a day is the optimal amount for good health**

There's scant evidence to show whether 10,000 is the gold standard for steps, or simply blue-sky marketing thinking (apparently it traces back 70-odd years to a Japanese marketing campaign for the first commercial pedometer 'Manpo-kei' – translated in English as the 10,000 step meter). Researchers have found there are [plenty of benefits](#) linked to hitting the 10,000-step target, but there are also [studies that show](#) you can still benefit from doing much less. For example, taking 5,000 or more steps a day is associated with a lower risk of heart disease and stroke than taking less than 5,000 steps. Bottom line – every step is a step in the right direction.

[Find out the best step count for your body.](#)

### **Rest is always best when you're sick**

Australian Scientist Professor Rob Newton has spent years testing exercise prescriptions on the chronically ill and believes that exercise, not bed rest, is the answer. His recommendation is to be physically active on most days, if not every day. "Even if you're extremely unwell, if you adopt a 'rest attitude', you will only have a worse outcome. There is always some exercise you can do." He adds: "If you're sedentary and your immune system is compromised because of that, then you're more likely to get colds and flu and you're more likely to have more serious effects from these illnesses."

[Read more about why exercise is the best medicine.](#)

### **Exercise turns fat into muscle**

What happens to fat when you 'burn' it is something the majority of exercisers are unclear on – 98 percent of health and fitness professionals surveyed were also unsure of the answer! Many believe fat cells are transformed into muscle cells, or that fat cells leave the body via the colon. There's also the misconception that fat is converted into energy and lost as heat (perhaps based on the 'energy in equals energy out' assumption). The truth is, fat is converted into carbon dioxide and water – most of which you breathe out.

[Learn more about how exercise burns fat and where it goes.](#)

### **A glass of wine a day is good for heart health**

In the past, the fact that French people have lower rates of heart disease than the US population has been pinned on their red wine intake (researchers posited that modest amounts of alcohol could improve good cholesterol (HDL-cholesterol) levels). But a more likely explanation is that the French are typically thinner, fitter and more active. With this in mind, we can't say alcohol improves health, but perhaps if you lead a brilliantly healthy lifestyle then a little bit of wine won't kill you. That being said, alcohol is a neural depressant and a toxin, so choosing to abstain from drinking can often be the smartest option.

[Find out the healthiest alcohol options.](#)

## Resting always lessens feelings of stress and exhaustion

Contrary to popular belief, taking time out on the sofa is not the best way to deal with signs of burnout, stress and exhaustion. A recent study has highlighted a far better remedy... exercise. Scientists found mentally worn-out individuals enjoyed significantly better recovery for cognitive flexibility, mood, tiredness, self-perceived cognitive capacity, and motivation when they got moving – and all it took was one 30-minute cycle session. An earlier study also identified aerobic workouts as the perfect mood-boosting formula.

[Discover how to battle burnout.](#)

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