

The Fitness Myth: No Pain, No Gain

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We have all heard the fitness myth, “no pain, no gain.” It is a popular phrase and a common fitness cliché. While often intended as motivation, it is truly a myth. Many people believe that if their muscles don’t hurt, they are not having an effective workout. Or that if you are in pain and don’t push through you may see yourself as a coward or you are making an excuse not to exercise.

Exercise can be intense and some level of soreness or discomfort may occur. When you first begin an exercise routine, you may use muscles that have not been used for a while and are not used to the exertion. You do need to push your body outside of its comfort zone to create increased stress on your body (progressive overload) to make change. This may cause initial discomfort or soreness, often at the start of a new exercise program. This is due to the natural process of tearing the muscle fibers and rebuilding them and is actually how you gain muscle mass and tone. A balanced, integrated exercise routine that starts with a dynamic warm-up you will help reduce your chances of normal muscle soreness.

Don’t confuse soreness with pain – they are very different. Soreness is more of a dull, ache or burning sensation in your muscles. It is normal and will gradually dissipate. Pain is a very uncomfortable and often sharp or acute sensation in your bones, joints or muscles. Muscle soreness is often bilateral while pain, indicating a potential injury is often unilateral.

Pain is neither a requirement nor a normal response to a workout. There is a reason for physical pain. It is your body’s way of telling you that something is wrong and that your body needs attention where it hurts. It can be a warning sign of a strain, torn or damaged ligament or an overstretched or exhausted muscle.

Pain ultimately affects the way we move and often times results in dysfunctional movement patterns increasing your risk for injury. If you experience pain during, or after your exercise routine and continue to exercise you may traumatize your joints and muscles. If you push yourself to continue working out you are doing more harm than good.

Exercise is intended to make your life better by:

Giving you more energy

Improving your mood and confidence

Reducing your stress and anxiety

Improving your focus, and productivity

Making you stronger

In order to realize any of these benefits, exercise needs to be a consistent part of your life. If you are injured and cannot exercise you will miss all the benefits you could achieve. When it comes to exercise, if you experience pain, you should stop what you’re doing. Either adjust the exercise so that you’re pain free or try a new exercise.

The bottom line: Pain is ultimately our body’s signal telling us that something is not right about the activity we are performing. . No one has ever “gained” anything but an injury from working through the “pain”. Pushing through pain will likely leave you with an injury and a major exercise setback.

So the next time you hear “No Pain, No Gain” you should say

“No Way.”

Additional Info

Edition: Arlington-Fairfax

Year: 2015

Month: June

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