



The Top 10 Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistakes Preventing You From Getting Ripped

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It's All About Fat Loss!

Fat loss! It's really what most of us are ultimately after isn't it? Sure we may have different goals along the life of our fitness journey; things like more muscular development, enhanced strength and the like, but when it all comes full circle, the majority of us want to be lean ... very lean. We want to see our abs. We want muscle definition. We're after a certain eye-catching 'look'.

There's just something about a lean, muscular physique that turns heads every time. In a land of physical mediocrity it makes you stand out in a crowd. People notice. It makes you 'different' from the average person and there's something about being in great physical shape that's empowering. And really, who wants to be average anyway? Stop and imagine the next time you find yourself heading to the beach or on a hot vacation and the confident feelings that would come with stripping down to your swimsuit and knowing you're in great shape. Not just good shape, but great shape. You've got nothing to hide. Trouble spots? You don't have any. People see you and they know you work out. Why? Because the evidence is obvious and the fruits of your labor are apparent in your appearance.

So why aren't more people successful in their quest for a dramatic physique transformation? The gyms are full of apparently hard-working people, and yet, for some reason in many cases, you'd be hard-pressed to believe some of these people spend so much time in the gym if you'd walked by them on the street or saw them on the beach. Why?

The first problem is that it's not just about effort. You could be giving 100% effort on every aspect of your program, but if your program isn't optimized for a fat-loss physique transformation, it's like riding a stationary bike and expecting to get somewhere. You're working hard on something that isn't designed to generate results. You're working hard doing the wrong thing.

If you're serious about not only getting in great shape, but getting in the best shape of your life, you first and foremost need to set some concrete goals. Setting concrete goals forces you to create a meaningful deadline,

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realize there will be a cost to you (time, self control, etc) and commits you to working towards and realizing these goals. That's step one. Again remember, you could put all the effort in the world into your physique-transformation program, but if you're still making critical fat-loss mistakes, you're going to once again find yourself spinning your wheels. If you really want to transform your body and what you're doing isn't working, then you simply can't continue along the path you're on. Things have to change.

What comes next is an explanation of the not-so-obvious top 10 fat-loss mistakes and how to avoid them. Implement the suggestions made in this free report and I guarantee you will make more fat-loss progress than ever and you will be well on your way to your own dramatic physique transformation.

Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistake #1: Starting Too Late

There's nothing worse than having these big plans to be in great shape by a certain date ... only to realize you're not going to make it. Why? Because you started too late and didn't give yourself enough time. It's always best to err on the side of caution and give yourself more than enough time, rather than not enough time. After all, there's nothing wrong with being in shape too early.

If it's your first time trying to take your physique to places it's never been before, the advice to start early is even more prudent. Everything might look great on paper - the perfect diet, the perfect training program and all the motivation in the world - but you just never know how your body is going to respond, Maybe you'll be one of the fortunate ones for whom it all works like clockwork. But for everyone outside this category, what tends to happen is they realize they're behind schedule and they try to play catch up by trying to 'fast forward' fat loss.

The next thing you know you're doing more cardio than you need to be doing, and eating less calories than you should be eating. Basically, this one mistake

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forces you to make other mistakes. The next thing you know, you're saying goodbye to some of your hard-earned muscle. It's better to be safe than sorry, so give yourself ample time to meet your deadline.

How much time do you need? This of course depends on one, what is your end goal, and two, how far away from that end goal you presently find yourself. It's difficult to say how long you'll need to realize your fat-loss goal as everyone is different. The more weight you need to lose (and therefore the higher your body fat percentage is), the faster you can lose fat. As you get leaner and your bodyfat is lower, your rate of fat loss will decrease. On average, you're probably safe to bet on about 1-2lbs of fat per week, again recognizing that in some cases it can be more and in others it can be less. In addition, it's also wise to remember that fat loss is not a linear phenomenon - some weeks may produce better results than others. The take home point is that if you've set a deadline, make sure you give yourself enough time to meet your deadline.

Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistake #2:

Not Knowing How Much You're Eating

While there are some people that can get in shape by just 'cleaning up' their diet, for most of us, this isn't going to be the case. Yes, if you've got a lot of fat to lose, you can definitely start losing fat by simply exercising more and making better dietary choices. Foods that are traditionally seen as 'clean' are generally more nutrient dense and calorically sparse. So if you replace some of the higher-calorie foods you're typically eating with more wholesome choices, yes, that caloric decrease is likely going to net you some fat loss ... up to a point. Once you hit a certain point though, and this will likely differ from person to person, just making the right choices isn't going to cut it anymore.

The key to fat loss is eating the right amount of calories for YOUR body. This is why a cookie cutter, one-size-fits-all nutritional strategy can't possibly be optimal for everyone. Your program needs to be customized to your body for maximum results. This ties into the 'quality over quantity' mistake talked about

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later on in this report, but suffice it to say, your energy intake, relative to your body's energy requirements is the primary determinant of your fat-loss progress. You could be eating all the cleanest and healthiest foods available, but if you're eating too much, you're eating too much. Whether it's from chicken breast or pizza, if your end-of-day calories come in higher than the calories required to maintain your bodyweight, you're not going to lose fat. You need a caloric deficit, and you don't have one. Along the same lines, if you're eating too few calories for your bodyweight, you're also going to experience less-than- optimal results, albeit for different reasons.

Consider two bodybuilders; one weighs 250 lbs and the other weighs 200 lbs. It should be quite obvious that their nutritional requirements aren't going to be the same right? They each need to eat for their bodyweight ... yes, bodyweight.

Some people base caloric intake on lean body mass. This is another mistake. One of the prevailing thoughts many people have is that muscle is metabolically active tissue and body fat is simply dead weight. This however, is only partially true. While muscle is obviously a very metabolically active tissue, it's not as metabolically active as many people think. You often hear the claim that each additional pound of muscle you add will boost metabolism by 50 calories per day. Now wouldn't that be nice? 20 lbs of muscle later and you get to eat an additional 1000 calories per day. Sorry, not true. The actual number is 13 calories/kg/day, or put in a comparable figure, just under 6 calories/lb/day. Clearly a far cry from the 50 calories/lb/day claimed. Add to that the fact that fat is definitely not just dead weight; it too is metabolically active coming in at 4.5 calories/kg/day or just over 2 calories/lb/day. So there's one reason to use total bodyweight in your caloric determination.

Another reason to use total bodyweight, and this would apply even if the above weren't true, is that if you're carrying around an extra 30lbs of fat, you're lugging around that weight every day. That burns calories. Think about it. What if you carried around a back pack that weighed 30 pounds all day long, or took two 15-pound dumbbells and carried them up a flight of stairs? That

would be more work and as a result, would burn more calories. In the end, that individual's caloric requirements are simply higher.

Now back to the point of the mistake of not knowing how much you're eating. The art of dieting isn't in the initial nutritional strategy you've put together or are following, but rather, the changes that get made to it to ensure continued progress. When your initial set up fails to produce continued results, how do you know what to do with your calories if you don't know how much you're eating in the first place? If your plan is to decrease calories by another 10%, you can't do that if you don't know how many calories you're eating. This is the key to fat-loss success - the ability to troubleshoot your diet, and to do that, you need to know how much you're eating.

Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistake #3:

Undereating

I can't tell you how many times I've had to tell people that they need to be eating more food if they want to lose fat. On the surface it seems counterintuitive but you have people out there are basically starving themselves, women especially, on any number of super low-calorie diets and wondering why they've plateaued and their physiques refuse to improve. The more-is-better mentality is alive and well when it comes to training and cardio, but the less-is-better mentality is just as alive and well when it comes to nutrition and caloric intake.

In many cases, I find myself having to do some corrective damage control in situations like this. In such cases, I will take the client to maintenance calories for a while, up their carbohydrate intake, etc., all in an effort to 'reset the system' so to speak. Then when they resume their caloric deficit, and a sane one at that, fat loss resumes.

What's a sane caloric deficit? Maintenance calories can generally be assumed to fall in the 14-15x total bodyweight (TBW) ballpark. Of course this is just an

approximation and some will have maintenance intakes higher and some will have maintenance intakes lower. Assuming this is reasonably accurate, a 20% deficit is a good place to start. That puts you around 12x TBW for your starting caloric intake. For some, this may be too high, particularly for women of lighter bodyweight for whom a 20% dietary deficit doesn't create a sufficient enough fat-loss deficit. For most however, this is a good starting point.

Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistake #4:

Not Using An Outcome-Based Approach

If something is broken you need to fix it, right? What do you do if your training and nutrition program stops producing the desired results? You think you're doing the right thing; you're eating well, you're lifting weights, you're doing cardio, but for some reason, the results just aren't coming like you thought they should. What do you do? Keep plugging away? Common sense would seem to say no. Why continue doing something that's not working? Yet this is what a lot of people do; they just keep plugging away, and they keep spinning their wheels. Listen, if what you're doing isn't working, doing it longer isn't going to make it suddenly start working. Your program needs some trouble shooting and you need to make some changes.

What's an outcome-based approach? It's really quite logical. What you do is based on the results of what you've done. Getting the results you're after? Stay the course. Not getting the results you're after? Make changes. See? Common sense. I think the best time line to monitor your results is biweekly; it's long enough to see if what you're doing is promoting any physical changes but not so long, that you've wasted a lot of time spinning your wheels on a program that is not working. If there are no changes in two weeks, adjust your program. Reassess your caloric intake. Perhaps you need to lower calories by another 10%. Look to your diet first; don't automatically assume you're not doing enough cardio because more than likely, you already are.

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Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistake #5:

Quality Before Quantity

Quality before quantity is another common nutritional mistake many fall prey too. In actuality, *quantity* trumps quality and this refers to the fact that how much you eat is more important than what you eat when it comes to fat loss. As mentioned already in this report, fat loss is all about creating a deficit. So, you can be eating the all the cleanest, healthiest foods, but if you're not eating the right amount of food for *your* body, then your fat loss is going to be less than optimal. You can still overeat clean food and find yourself with more calories coming in, than going out. End result? No fat loss and more than likely weight gain instead.

This also obviously ties into the mistake of not knowing how much you're eating. To ensure you're eating the right amount of food for your body, you need to first know how much you're eating. Remember, fat loss is all about creating the deficit and this can be done via your diet, your training or more commonly, some combination of both.

So technically when it comes to putting your own fat-loss plan together, the first and foremost thing to do is set your calories. As previously mentioned, generally setting them around 20% below your maintenance calories is a good place to start. From here, following an outcome-based approach, you will adjust this caloric intake based on your rate of fat loss. Secondary to this you need to set your protein intake and ensure you're meeting your omega-3 fat requirements (ie. fish oil supplementation).

Protein intake should be set anywhere between 1.0 and 1.5g/lb of bodyweight. Technically it should be based on lean body mass, but unless you're very overweight the difference between basing your protein requirements on total bodyweight versus lean body mass will be insignificant. If you are quite overweight, there will be a larger discrepancy between these two numbers. One way to cut the difference is to base your requirements on your targeted bodyweight, which will be lower than your current weight and higher than your

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lean bodyweight, and therefore closer to more accurate requirements.

Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistake #6: Ignoring the 90% Rule

One of the big obstacles to fat loss success is a lack of dietary compliance - that is, adherence to your plan. You have to be following your plan if you're expecting it to work right? Plans are only as good as the people following them. No matter how well designed and individualized a nutritional strategy is for you, if you don't follow it, it's not going to produce the desired results. Now, no one said it's going to be easy. There's an obvious cost. There's a reason more people aren't walking around with enviable physiques. It's hard work. But, with a little planning, some dedication, some self-control, and a finely-tuned strategy, you'll get to the best you possible. Big-time results are right there for the taking.

Before you can measure the effectiveness or the results of any plan, you first have to look at how well you adhered to it. Did you really follow your plan, or did you just 'kinda follow it'? Think of it as a scientific experiment. The hypothesis is that your nutritional strategy as it's designed will produce a certain result, namely fat loss. As with any well-designed experiment, in order to test this hypothesis you need to control the variables that affect the outcome of the experiment. So what's the independent variable of this experiment? The food you're eating. If this variable isn't controlled to a satisfactory level, there's really no point in measuring results (measurements, bodyweight, body composition, etc). Without sufficient adherence to your plan, you really can't explain the outcome. Was your lack of results due to your meal plan (that wasn't being followed to an acceptable level)? Was it due to missed meals? Changed meals? Cheat meals? Without control over these variables, you will never know.

The problem with not knowing is that when a plateau comes around, and it will come around, your ability to trouble shoot your strategy is effectively

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eliminated. There's no point in changing a nutritional plan to boost results if the original plan wasn't being followed to an acceptable level. The plan isn't the problem, your ability to adhere to it is the problem. You need to accept that every action has a consequence. The most important element of long-term physical success is your ability to stick to your nutritional plan.

So what would be considered successful dietary adherence? The magic number is 90%. If you follow your plan 90% of the time, your chances of succeeding are very good. Of course, the better the adherence, the better the results and the leaner you are, the more important adherence becomes. Fat loss is first and foremost about nutrition. Training and cardio, while obviously important elements of your program, aren't just second to nutrition; they're a distant second. Nutrition is what will make or break you. How many times do you go into the gym and see the same people year in and year out. They're working hard, they're lifting weights, they're sweating it up on some random cardio machine, but there's a problem here - they don't look any different. So sure, they're working hard in the gym, but do you ever stop and wonder? What are they doing the other 23 hours of the day? Clearly something isn't adding up here. Something in those other 23 hours of the day is compromising all their efforts and you can be pretty sure it's what they're putting in their mouth.

Most people, when asked how well they are following their plan, would probably assume they are doing a good job of it. But are they really? Self-perception is a rather tricky thing. What about those few little treats, or those two missed meals on Saturday when you were out, or those two cheat meals? It's quite easy to fool yourself into thinking you're doing a great job ... until you actually sit down and figure it out. Next thing you know, you're sitting at 75% compliance. Little dietary indiscretions don't seem like a big deal in isolation, but with enough of these 'little' slip-ups, you're sitting at a big slip up before you know it. These little mistakes definitely add up, and fast.

Well-known nutritionist, Dr. John Berardi, popularized the idea of a compliance grid to track how closely you are really adhering to your diet. It's a great tool, yet quite simple; you take a piece of paper and make a 6x7 grid (6 meals x 7

days), which will give you 42 boxes. Of course, if you're only eating four or five meals per day, you would adjust it accordingly. When you eat a planned meal, you put an X in that box. When you change a meal, you put an asterisk (*) and if you miss a meal entirely, you put a zero (0) in the box. At the end of the week you count up the X's and do a little math. Many times this is just the bucket-of-cold-water-to-the-face wake up call that people need. What you thought was 90% adherence turns out to be closer to 75%. The lack of progress now makes perfect sense.

Now, the savvy among you will quickly realize that 90% adherence allows you the opportunity to 'mess up' four times on a 42 meals-per-week plan. That seems easy enough doesn't it? 90% is generally the lowest acceptable level of dietary adherence that doesn't lead to much in the way of compromised results. The more you fall below this 90% figure, the greater the likelihood that your progress will stall or simply be non-existent. Now that's not a green light to have three or four free meals per week of course. If you really want to succeed, aim even higher. Challenge yourself, one day at a time. But if you realize you're falling short and are below the 90% cut off, you will likely have your answer to the question of why your progress is slower than you hoped.

However, what about the size of these 'off plan' meals? What if your free meals are on the order of say 1500 calories? It's really not that hard to do. And let's say you have two of them a week. Well, it's pretty easy to see that causing a problem even though technically on a 42 meals-per-week plan, that would still be 95% adherence to your plan. That's successful right? Not so fast. Do you see where this is headed yet?

Instead of looking at this from a 'meals position', let's look at it from a 'calories position'. Let's say your total weekly calories consumed are approximately 12000 (1,700 calories x 7 days). Technically, a 10% deviation (resulting in 90% adherence in terms of caloric intake - which is really what matters for progress), is only 1200 calories. So, you'd basically have a maximum of 1200 calories to 'screw up' with, and still remain at 90% adherence. That's it. That might be two meals that add up to 1200 or perhaps just one bigger meal. And

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the lower your calories (sorry to those of you who are smaller/lighter) the smaller the free meals need to be. If this hypothetical person who has 12000 calories per week to consume, has two 1500-calorie free meals (again, very easy to do), that's 3000 calories of off-plan eating. That equates to only 75% adherence on a caloric level and that is unfortunately much too low.

Often, guidelines for free meals have been rather general and vague; something along the lines of 'be mindful of portions' or something similar. For many, this really doesn't mean much and provides little to no guidance for what is and is not acceptable. So, now we have something a little more concrete. When we know our weekly caloric intake, we can see what 10% deviation equates to and set that as a top limit. Again, that's not to say that one has to take all those calories, as 95% is better than 90% and 100% is better than 95%. Does it take a little fun out of the free meals? Maybe. But they were never meant to be free-for-alls anyway. Food for thought ...

Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistake #7: Not Doing Structured Refeeds or Taking Planned Diet Breaks

It sure would be nice if fat loss progress was a linear phenomenon, but it's not. It sure would be nice if there were no such thing as fat-loss plateaus, but it's not. Anyone who's dieted before knows that fat-loss plateaus are an inevitable part of dieting. What I mean by that is your initial program set up simply stops producing the desired results. So what do you have to do? Based on an outcome-based approach, you need to make some modifications to your plan.

There are a number of physiological changes that occur when one eats in a caloric deficit. Your bodyweight, or more accurately, bodyfat is generally regulated which means that your body adjusts in response to deviations from your 'normal' bodyfat level in an effort to maintain a certain bodyfat. Scientists refer to this as one's 'set point'.

Metabolism generally chases caloric intake, which means that when you raise calories, it goes up, albeit not very much. On the contrary, when you lower calories, your metabolism will slow down to a degree as well. Appetite responds in a similar fashion. There's really just no getting around this - rest assured, it comes back easily.

In addition, sympathetic nervous system activity falls, thyroid hormone levels fall, and a number of regulatory hormones that govern metabolism and subsequent fat loss (leptin, ghrelin, peptide YY, etc) all adjust in response to your lowered caloric intake. Changes in these hormones are monitored by the hypothalamus in your brain. In essence, they tell your brain what's happening downstream - whether you're losing bodyfat for example. As a result, your brain sends out a message in response to these changes in order to adjust metabolism, appetite and activity levels. The result is slowed and in some cases, stalled fat loss.

This effect tends to be greater the longer you've been dieting, the more you've deviated from your normal set point, and the lower your bodyfat levels, and as such, this is when refeeds and planned periods of maintenance calories become very important.

A refeed is a basically a designated period of high carbohydrate (and lower fat) eating. Beyond the psychological benefits of being able to enjoy some fun carbohydrates, there are some potential physiological benefits that function to aid in furthering your fat-loss efforts. Periods of high carbohydrate eating have the potential to reverse the negative hormonal changes discussed previously. Basically, they almost 'trick' your body into believing everything is normal. In addition, given their high-carb nature, another benefit is a refilling of muscle glycogen which will help maintain intense weight-training performance.

The issue is whether the effect these refeeds have on normalizing the previously mentioned hormones is significant or not. Whether or not they are, from a scientific standpoint is debatable, but anecdotally, they definitely help with fat loss. The shortest time period that has been shown to have a positive effect on leptin levels is five hours, although this was shown in a rat study. The

response however would not be one that would be considered significant. It is debatable as to whether even full day refeeds significantly impact levels of these hormones, but again, something is definitely happening since there is no doubt it helps with fat loss.

The question becomes when do you start implementing them and how do you put one together. The main issue in determining the utility of a refeed is where your bodyfat is. That is, the higher it is, the longer you can go without having to worry about any 'metabolic consequences' and as such, the need to start using refeeds. The leaner you are, the more important using refeeds becomes if your goal is to get even leaner. The timing of when to start refeeding will vary from person to person. Generally when you're already starting to look relatively lean, you've got some muscle definition, and you are seemingly doing everything else by the book, yet not losing fat, it is probably a good time to start implementing regular refeeds.

However, shorter refeeds (5-6 hours focused around workouts) can be used even earlier. These would be less for any physiological benefit and more for psychological benefit. It would almost be a little like carb cycling in the sense that once a week or so you are getting a very high carb day that allows you the opportunity for some fun carbohydrates.

You should be consuming mainly low-fat, low-fiber carbohydrates and lean proteins during your refeeds and fat should be kept relatively low - on the order of around 50g per day for a full-day refeed. While some sugar (sucrose, fructose) is fine, you don't want all of your refeed carbs to be sucrose/fructose based. So basically some low-fat junk (refined carbohydrates) is good; all junk is probably not. How much? Obviously for the shorter refeeds (5-6 hours) you're going to be eating less as your refeed is going to occur over 2-3 meals. Longer refeeds therefore warrant more carbs. Generally you can work up to consuming as many carbs as you can without regaining bodyfat. I would suggest starting with the shorter refeeds and moving to the longer refeeds as you progress. Setting carb intake in the range of 2-5g/kg of bodyweight is a good starting position.

A quick note on women and refeeds - a number of women seem to respond better to the shorter refeeds, but with the caveat that they occur at a greater frequency. So instead of one full weekly refeed for example, perhaps a 5-6 hour refeed two times per week or in some cases three times per week. The greater the frequency, the lower the carbohydrate allotment. At this point it might start to look like a carbohydrate-cycling plan of sorts.

Unfortunately, there comes a point when even using regular refeeds isn't enough to promote continued fat loss in everyone. You've just been dieting too long and your body is fighting back. This is when a period of maintenance calorie eating is a great strategy. Planned periods of maintenance eating is one of the most underused and effective dieting strategies out there. A two-week period of maintenance eating will go a long way to normalizing your body and 'resetting' it for further fat loss. Not only is there a strong physiological benefit (normalizing of the regulatory hormones), but there is the psychological benefit of allowing yourself to eat more, and enjoying more dietary freedom, etc. Everyone eventually needs a break from dieting and unless you've got a contest deadline, take the break. Even if you do have a contest, start early enough to allow for one two-week block at maintenance calories.

Setting it up is simple. Set your calories at 14-15x TBW, ensure you're getting 100-150g carbohydrate per day to upregulate thyroid hormone activity, set your protein at 1-1.5g/lb and make up the rest of your calories from quality fat sources. Generally you want to treat this as a diet with more food and a few more scheduled off-plan meals than you'd normally take. Technically maintenance calories are meant to maintain. You don't want to gain bodyfat and if calories are set correctly, you won't. However, chances are your weight will climb a little due to changes in fluid balance, increased glycogen storage, etc. Don't fret, it's easy come, easy go.

Continue along this path for two weeks and then resume your deficit and watch the fat start to fall off again.

Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistake #8:

An Overemphasis on Steady State Cardio

What's the first thing most people think of when they think of fat loss? Cardio. Yep, hour upon hour of boring, mind-numbing cardio. As soon as the weather starts to get nice, the treadmills, the bikes, the ellipticals ... especially the ellipticals, get busy. Why? Because that is what is been ingrained in our heads.

You want to lose fat? Time for lots of cardio. Here's the problem - there's a reason you have to do so much of it; it doesn't burn many calories to begin with. What? But the elliptical says you burned 1000 calories in 10 minutes? Sorry, not true. All of these machines overestimate caloric expenditure. Here's the problem with placing too much emphasis on steady state cardio.

It's boring.

It's time consuming.

The more you do, the more you have to do. The more you do an activity the better you get at it. As you become more aerobically fit, you'll become a more efficient fat burner. Sounds good doesn't it? How much fuel does a fuel-efficient car burn? Not much. It gets a lot of output for little input. Same with us. The more efficient we become, the less energy our bodies have to expend for a given amount of activity. Efficiency sure sounds good, but when it comes to fat loss, inefficiency is where it's at. Look at a lot of competitors (why many still do this is beyond me). They start off with 30 minutes of cardio four times a week and by the time they're done dieting, they're up to 60 minutes twice a day. Why? Whether it really has to do with increased efficiency or not, the point is, they've had to add more and more. Did the 30 minutes four times per week stop producing results? Did they become more efficient? What they could have done instead is simply up the intensity, rather than resort to ridiculous durations. And by the way, anyone who has to resort to that amount of cardio to lose fat really needs to reassess their diet.

The fat-burning zone is overrated. Did you know that as you sit here reading

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this article, you are in the fat-burning zone? Think you're burning lots of fat and getting leaner? Didn't think so. The whole idea behind the fat-burning zone is that you use a greater proportion of fat as a fuel source with lower intensity work. As exercise intensity climbs, there's an increasing reliance on stored carbohydrate in the form of glycogen to fuel activity. Sure, I'll buy that. But so what? When it comes to fat loss, what matters is that you create a caloric deficit. Where it comes from doesn't matter. What you burn during an activity doesn't matter. At the end of the day, if you've created the necessary caloric deficit, you're going to lose fat.

Now the take home message here isn't that steady state cardio is bad or that it has no place in a fat-loss program. The common mistake made is an *overemphasis* on steady state cardio for fat loss. Too much steady state cardio, particularly at higher intensities can result in a loss of some of your hard-earned muscle and strength. However, steady state cardio can still play a role in a successful fat-loss program as an 'adjunct therapy' of sorts used to top off caloric expenditure, and in some cases, it's recommended. Take a relative beginner for example - they're far more suited to low-to-moderate intensity steady state cardio than they are to a more intensive protocol like high-intensity interval training.

Most people have heard of interval training by now. If you haven't it simply refers to a form of 'cardio' where you repeatedly alternate periods of high-intensity effort (such as a 30-second sprint) with periods of low-intensity effort (such as a 60-second walk). There have been a number of studies that have demonstrated the superiority of interval training for fat loss, despite burning fewer calories during the actual activity. Not only that, but it is a far more time efficient means of promoting fat loss as not everyone, or even many for that matter, has the time for multiple daily sessions of steady state cardio. Consider a very intense 15-minute interval workout versus a 60-minute ride on the stationary bike. However, interval training is also not the be-all, end-all of fat loss. Yes, it works, but just like steady state cardio, it too can be overdone and applied incorrectly. So the optimal approach uses both modalities.

Interval training, similar to intense weight training, is a very CNS (Central Nervous System) intensive form of exercise. How your overall training program is set up will determine where you place your interval-training workouts. Two key points to consider:

Think of interval training as a lower-body workout and as such, be sure to be mindful of just how much lower-body training (volume) you're doing. Too many interval workouts and too many lower-body workouts is a recipe for muscle and strength loss.

If you're doing an upper/lower split for example, your best bet is to put your interval-training workouts on your lower body days. Why? So that your legs have more complete rest days per week. Doing them on your 'Off' or 'Upper Body' days for example, gives your legs less recovery time and you run the risk of localized overtraining of your lower body.

As your bodyfat approaches very lean levels or if you have your calories set very low (there are times for this, but it's still generally a mistake for most people), be even more mindful of how much interval training you're doing. Recovery is at a premium deep into a diet and one's carbohydrate intake is typically reduced at this point as well. This might be a time for some less intensive forms of cardio - longer duration intervals, which by default have to be less intense, more steady state cardio, etc.

Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistake #9:

Not Having a Strength Focus To Your Training

Metabolic workouts have become very popular these days. If you're not familiar with the term 'metabolic workouts', the term basically refers to workouts that are generally a bit higher on the rep scale and lower on the rest-interval scale. They often also revolve around non-competing supersets with the end goal of getting a lot of work done in a short amount of time. These workouts are generally really tough from a perceived effort standpoint. That is,

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if your cardiorespiratory fitness is lacking, you'll probably find yourself getting your butt kicked. A couple examples of such programs would be Alwyn Cosgrove's Afterburn program as well as Craig Ballantyne's Turbulence Training program. The end goal of such workouts is to expend a lot of energy, and create what Alwyn has called 'afterburn' - the heightened caloric expenditure that occurs in the post-workout recovery period in such workouts.

While I agree with the concepts and application of such programs, I think training for strength needs to be made a priority in your training. That is, at least some of your workouts need to be done above a certain intensity threshold in order to provide your body with a sufficient enough reason to keep your muscle. As they say, what builds it, keeps it, and if you don't use it, you lose it. A lot of the metabolic-type workouts are based on the concept of the post-workout calorie burn, otherwise known as EPOC (excess post-exercise oxygen consumption). While the effect is real, it's not tremendously significant.

Muscle loss while dieting becomes more of a concern when your bodyfat is getting low. When it's higher, or you are just starting out on your fat-loss quest, muscle loss, provided you are doing some resistance training is highly unlikely. But again, as bodyfat gets lower, it becomes an increasingly larger concern. If you set a priority to stay strong throughout your diet, and you are successful at it, you will likely minimize any muscle loss.

While high rep, short rest interval training does have the potential to burn a fair number of calories, at least some of your training during a fat-loss stage should be used to preserve (or even increase) muscle mass as opposed to stimulating fat loss. Fat loss is going to, or should, come primarily from nutrition, with the rest coming from various forms of cardiovascular work (interval training, bodyweight circuits, some steady state cardio, etc.). Some of your weight training should be focused primarily on getting strong, and keeping the muscle you have, not fat loss. Let the other 23 hours of the day take care of the fat loss.

Your best bet is to avoid a lot of high-rep, low-load training while dieting. Your body already has a limited capacity to recover due to a lack of fuel/substrate

when on reduced calories. Light weights while in caloric deficit will likely result in more muscle loss as your body, while attempting to adapt to a caloric deficit, tries to 'slow down' over time. This happens via various hormonal responses as well as by eliminating the more metabolically active tissue - muscle. Your body will always attempt to adapt to any change you throw at it - and this includes a caloric deficit. The more you deviate from your 'set point', the more your body will respond to bring you back.

Hormones respond to over and undereating. On reduced calories and as your bodyfat drops, catabolic hormones rise, promoting increased amino acid oxidation (protein breakdown) and anabolic hormones fall. Net protein accretion/retention decreases, protein oxidation increases, cell volume generally decreases, leptin production decreases, etc., etc. Remember, what builds muscle is what keeps muscle, and if you don't use it, you lose it. You need to give your body a reason to hold onto the muscle and this requires you to be training above a minimum intensity threshold. So, quite simply don't bother with these 15-20 rep sets. Train heavy and try to get and/or stay strong. Try to ensure you have some of your training set up in the 4-6 rep range as well.

The other thing to consider when comparing heavy versus light training while dieting is the effect each has on the look, or quality, of the muscles. Training with heavy weights improves both myogenic and neurogenic tone. The first refers to your muscle tone at rest while the second refers to muscle tone that is expressed when movements occur. Neurogenic tone is improved due to the effect lower rep training has on the sensitivity of various motor neurons. Myogenic tone is affected by the density of your muscles and is improved by stimulation of the contractile proteins, again via heavy, low rep training. Higher rep ranges unfortunately do not offer these benefits, and let's be honest, high rep training just isn't fun anyway. When a body is stripped of much of its fat, muscle density and hardness go a long way to enhancing the quality of a person's physique. Excluding the heavy, low rep work in favour of the oft prescribed high rep, short-rest-interval work for fat-loss training will not have nearly the same effect that focusing your training on heavy loads will have.

Not-So-Obvious Fat-Loss Mistake #10:

Too Much Volume

Muscular gains are the result of tension placed on the muscle (weight lifted) as well as how long that tension was applied (time under tension). Basically a product of the properly managed manipulation of volume and intensity. When your calories are over maintenance and you're eating enough, your ability to recover from more work in the gym is greater. You can train with more volume, cause more protein degradation, and yet recover and hopefully grow. Contrast that to when you're in a caloric deficit; your ability to recover from strenuous exercise is reduced, due to more than likely less than optimal anabolic hormone levels, decreased glycogen stores, and just generally lower energy intake. So you simply cannot do the same amount of work that you could if you were eating in a caloric surplus. If you try to, and this is one of the most common mistakes made in training while dieting, then you're going to find yourself eventually regressing, potentially losing size and strength, and feeling overtrained. As a result, the volume of your training (sets x reps) needs to be reduced and research suggests that you can maintain with a volume reduction as high as two thirds. Always keep in mind the goals of resistance training while dieting - *maintenance* of muscle and strength. You're simply not going to be making significant muscular gains while in a caloric deficit - no matter what anyone tells you. I'd typically err on the side of caution and do less when you want to do more. Remember what builds muscle, is what keeps muscle.

As for strength gains while dieting, this is possible, but again, clearly not to the extent that would be possible if one were eating in a caloric surplus. Provided you're not in too great a caloric deficit, and your training program is set up properly - decreased volume, focus on heavy, low reps, compound lifts, etc., then yes some strength gains are possible. This is also the proper way to train for the maintenance of strength and size. These strength gains while dieting, in the absence of muscle mass increases are the result of the effects such training has on the nervous system. Strength gains can be derived in two ways

- increased muscle mass and increased efficiency of the nervous system. The latter basically meaning an improved ability to recruit and fire the high threshold motor units - those most responsible for maximum strength and size.

Programming for successful fat loss really doesn't need to be that complicated. There are some basic rules and principles that need to be a part of every program, but beyond that, there can be a lot of variability in how the final program is set up and packaged. Many people are aware of the more common fat-loss mistakes, and they successfully avoid them, but in many cases, they still fall short of their ultimate physique goals. My hope is that the awareness you've gained from these not-so-obvious fat-loss mistakes will be the key to taking your physique to the next level.

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