

# Nobody *asked me,* **but...**

By Matt Brzycki



**L**ike most people, I have plenty of opinions. And when it comes to fitness, I am all too eager to offer my opinions, even if nobody asked me.

## OPINIONS

Here are a few opinions that I have on a variety of fitness-related topics:

### Balance Training

Nobody asked me but balance training does not necessarily improve balance. In one study, 39 young male soccer players were randomly assigned to three groups: One group performed balance training immediately before soccer training, another group did balance training immediately after soccer training and the third group

did no balance training. The balance training was done for 20 minutes per session three times per week for 12 weeks. The two groups that did balance training improved their balance while the group that did no

Sioux Falls, SD - Cody Henriksen (Augustana College) scores a takedown on Derrick Pomranky (University of Sioux Falls) during their 174 lb. match at the USF vs. Augustana Dual. Henriksen went on to win by fall. Photo by Mike Smith/MatShots.



balance training did not improve their balance. But the design of the study had a major flaw: The researchers assessed balance with the very same activities that were used for balance training. In other words, the subjects who improved at balancing on a single limb on a balance board likely did so because they practiced the skill of balancing on a single limb on a balance board for 12 weeks. The balance that is required for one activity is not related to the balance that is required for another. In a study that involved 320 subjects, the researcher found that the correlation between two balance tasks was "little more than zero." In another study, researchers looked at six tests of static and dynamic balance and found that the abilities that supported one test of balance were separate from those that supported another. This suggests that improving balance in one activity does not transfer to balance in another.

### Corn Syrup

Nobody asked me but high fructose corn syrup is not the cause of obesity. High fructose corn syrup is a synthetic sweetener that was created in the late 1960s. The manufacturing process starts out with kernels of corn and ends up with a concoction of fructose and glucose. It is found in numerous foods and beverages, ranging from the fairly obvious (yogurt and sweetened drinks) to the totally unexpected (bread and tomato soup). A study showed that from 1970-1999, consumption rates of high fructose corn syrup have closely paralleled obesity rates in the United States. This has led to the conclusion that high fructose corn syrup causes obesity. By all accounts, the rate of obesity in America has continued to climb steadily since 1999. Yet according to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the per capita consumption of high fructose corn syrup has dropped from a peak of 45.4 pounds per year in 1999 to 42.2 pounds per year in 2005. Besides, it is unreasonable to think that the obesity epidemic can be narrowed down to one single ingredient. The cause of obesity is a function of two variables: eating too much and exercising too little.

### Evening Eating

Nobody asked me but having a bite to eat after a certain time of the day will not automatically make you gain weight. Surely you have heard that food should not be eaten after a designated time such as 6:00 pm. Does this mean that if you eat one minute later, you will gain weight? Yeah, sure. And if you do not get home by midnight, you will 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. Along these lines, imagine that you are in Alabama standing a few inches from its border with Georgia. Alabama is in the Central Time Zone and Georgia is in the Eastern Time Zone. So if you are in Alabama and it is 5:00 pm, you are supposedly cleared to eat. But if you quickly step across the border into Georgia where it is 6:00 pm, do you really think that it is suddenly not okay for you to grab some chow without gaining weight?

### Lat Pulldown

Nobody asked me but using a wide grip during the lat pulldown does not build a wide back. Your potential for muscular development is based mainly 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 will 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 is 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, your grip in the lat pulldown should be slightly wider than shoulder-width apart.

### Knee Rehab

Nobody asked me but open kinetic chain exercises do not place an excessive amount of stress on the knee joint. If you ever had to rehab your knee, you probably heard of closed kinetic chain exercises and open kinetic chain exercises. What do those terms really mean? A closed kinetic chain exercise is one in which the feet are in contact with a surface such as a squat or leg press; an open kinetic chain exercise is one in which the feet are not in contact with a surface such as a leg extension. In a study that involved 27 patients with knee pain, the researchers concluded that closed kinetic chain exercises "are only a little more effective" than open kinetic chain exercises in reducing pain and increasing functionality. The researchers felt that the notion of avoiding open kinetic chain exer-

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cises in the treatment of knee pain is “unfounded.” Another study simulated closed kinetic chain exercises and three types of open kinetic chain exercises using three-dimensional computer models that were generated from cadaveric data. The stresses during open kinetic chain exercises were not significantly different from those generated by closed kinetic chain exercises.

### **Muscular Soreness**

Nobody asked me but muscular soreness does not necessarily mean that a workout was effective. In other words, there is no correlation between soreness and effectiveness. If you fell on your shoulder today, you will probably be sore tomorrow. But that does not mean that the soreness was the result of something productive. You can experience muscular soreness for a variety of reasons. For instance, you will probably be sore if you do an unfamiliar activity or more activity than you are accustomed. Suppose that you have not done the incline press in months but did the exercise today instead of the bench press. You will probably be sore tomorrow or the next day. And the main reason is because you have not done the incline press in a while. Or suppose that you increased your volume of training by doing either more exercises or more sets. Again, you will probably be sore tomorrow or the next day. By the way, it is okay to exercise even if soreness is present. In fact, doing a workout will help to alleviate the soreness more quickly than skipping a workout. If you exercise while you are sore, you may not be able to perform as well as usual but will be better off in the long run.

### **Overweight/Obese Americans**

Nobody asked me but 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 is 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 is 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 6’2” and weighs 205 pounds is based on BMI - categorized as overweight. Now, here is the kicker: This happens to be the listed height and weight of Randy Couture, former GrecoRoman wrestler and member of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) Hall of Fame. A quick glance at this great athlete would reveal that he is nowhere near being overweight. The fact is that based on height and weight, most competitive athletes including 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 would be counted as among those who are overweight or obese. I am not saying that weight is not a problem in the United States; just that the number of people who are classified as overweight or obese is inflated.

### **Overuse Injuries**

Nobody asked me but most individuals do far too many exercises for the front part of their shoulder which predisposes them to injuries. It is often assumed that the front raise is the only exercise that involves the front part of the shoulder. In general, however, the front part of the shoulder is used during the performance of any exercise for the torso in which you push a weight. This includes the bench press, incline press, decline press, dip, push-up, seated press, bent-arm fly and pec deck. Think about how many sets and repetitions you do that involve the front part of your shoulder. Now think about how many sets and repetitions 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 are increasing your chances of having a shoulder problem.

### **Scale Weight**

Nobody asked me but if you weigh yourself on a scale and then stand on your head, you will not weigh less when you step back on the scale. As ridiculous as it may sound, this tall tale has been circulating throughout pockets of the wrestling community for years and recently has been making its rounds on the Internet. Quick question: If this is true, where does the weight go? It certainly does not vanish into thin air. For something such as this to actually occur, it would violate the laws of thermodynamics.

### **Water Intake**

Nobody asked me but you do not have to drink at least eight eight-ounce glasses of water - or one-half gallon of water - on a daily basis. A high intake of water appears

to be beneficial in reducing the risk of several conditions including bladder cancer, colorectal cancer and heart disease. And, of course, water has several physiological functions such as regulating body temperature (which helps to keep you from overheating). Be that as it may, there is no scientific evidence that you need to drink eight eight-ounce glasses of water each day (or any other specific amount, for that matter). The volume of water that is needed can vary greatly from one individual to the next based upon such factors as age, size, level of fitness, level of activity and environmental conditions. And let us not forget that many foods and beverages - most notably milk, fruits, fruit juices, vegetables, sport drinks and soup - are very high in water and, thus, can be counted toward the daily total. Clearly, it is important for you to consume adequate amounts of fluids but this medical maxim does not hold any water.

### **Weightlifting Belts**

Nobody asked me but there is little need for most individuals to wear weightlifting belts in the weight room. Walk into just about any weight room and you will see that the use of lifting belts is fairly common. Ask people why they wear lifting belts and most of them would probably say that they do so to prevent injury. But you know what? If you are 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. Seriously. There is no reason whatsoever for you to do any exercise in which the risks outweigh the benefits. And while on the subject, there is no scientific support that the use of lifting belts improves performance in strength/fitness applications. In other words, a lifting belt does not enable you to lift more weight or do more repetitions.

### **THE LAST REP**

As they say, everybody is entitled to their opinion, some of mine, even if nobody asked me.

And these were.

Matt Brzycki has authored, co-authored or edited 15 books on strength and fitness including [Wrestling Strength: The Competitive Edge](#), [Wrestling Strength: Prepare to Win](#) and [Wrestling Strength: Dare to Excel](#). These three wrestling books are available at all major bookstores or through Cardinal Publishers Group (800-296-0481). 