

'Fat but Fit' – is NOT Healthy, Trim Up All

We now you cannot be 'fat and healthy'



Research has shown that individuals who are obese and relatively fit are still at risk of medical complications

The debate of whether you can be “fat but fit” continues to divide fitness and health professionals, as well as academics and scientists. The team behind the [latest study](#) into obesity discussed their findings at the European Congress on Obesity recently, concluding you simply can't be fat and fit.

Whilst attention grabbing headlines expose the “fat but fit” hypothesis as a big fat lie, it’s imperative we stop linking the idea that you can, or cannot, be “fat and fit”. The real issue is whether you can be “fat and healthy” – and the simple answer is no.

If you have excess body fat you cannot expect to remain free from any associated medical conditions and symptoms throughout your lifetime. If you are not currently experiencing any medically related issues, consider yourself lucky but not immune from storing up problems for the future.

While we continue to confuse fitness with health, viewing fat and fit as mutually exclusive, we imply those who have excess body fat aren’t or can’t engage in fitness activities. This is the danger in linking the notion. It also suggests that even if you’re exercising, and you have excess body fat, you’re failing in some way. This is a problem when we live in a society that is largely inactive and we need, and want, to promote inclusion and accessibility for everyone to engage in being active every day regardless of age, gender, disability, and body shape.

Fitness professionals pride themselves in understanding barriers to behaviour change and acknowledge many are deterred from fitness; perceiving the process of getting fit as uncomfortable, unpleasant and best suited to “sporty” or “athletic” individuals. While we persist in telling overweight individuals that fat and fit can’t co-exist, we fail to encourage them to engage in fitness and physical activity.

We perpetuate the idea fitness is an exclusive club and not for everyone.

The body positive movement promotes acceptance of all body shapes and sizes. This has gone some way to diminish the stigma around “fat”, making it more socially acceptable and reducing discrimination. The flip side to this is confusing empathy with absolving individuals of responsibility for their own health.

Obesity is on the rise

Fuelled by social media, large swathes of the fitness industry promotes diversity to drive more engagement; from overweight women taking part in yoga to obese men strength training – all are hailed as “inspirational”. Whilst these role models challenge the stereotypical view of what fitness looks like, we are left with addressing a misleading message being fat but active equals healthy. It doesn’t – it simply means you are engaging in activity but the medical risks of being overweight remain.

The health of the nation depends on us getting the message across that you can be overweight or obese and take part in fitness and physical activities. This is an important first step in reducing risks to health but being active needs to be aligned with efforts to improve diet, such as eliminating processed foods and curbing sugar and saturated fat intake, as well as addressing alcohol or sugary drink consumption (where applicable).

The big bottom line is you can’t be fat and healthy forever – it’s a ticking time bomb, and sooner or later it will lead to a disease or medical condition that is almost entirely preventable.



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