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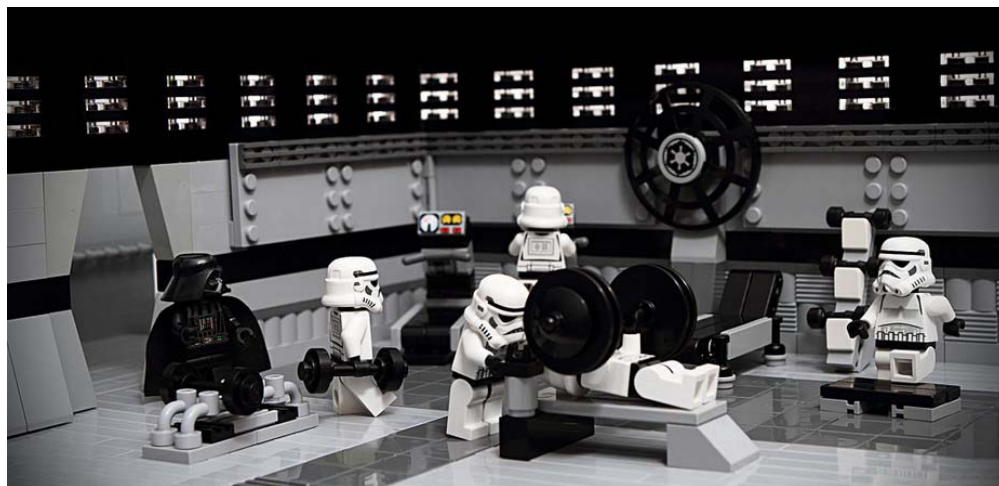
THE CONVERSATION

What is the best exercise for losing weight?

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Pumping iron: Is it really all worth it? W_Minshull, CC BY

It may come as little surprise that taking exercise is a way to lose weight. However, a debate about the best type of exercise for weight loss is likely to divide opinion.

The most obvious choice is endurance-type exercise which is usually done at a moderate intensity or steady state. The rationale is clear. This type of exercise expends more energy than resistance training.

Others will stress the importance of resistance training and its effects on basal metabolic rate (BMR). A single bout of resistance exercise can lead to a sustained increase in BMR that persists for up to 48 hours after exercise. Furthermore, increases in BMR have been observed after ten weeks of resistance training compared to endurance training and this may assist with weight control in the long term – at the cellular level, muscle tissue is denser than fat tissue and is therefore more “expensive” to run.

An alternative option is high-intensity interval training or HIT. Exercise is carried out at a low or moderate intensity with the caveat that several short bouts of high-intensity, often “all-out”, exercise are included. It is considered to be more time-efficient and research shows this type of exercise can bring about rapid beneficial changes in metabolic function and even reductions in body fat. However, such exercise is likely intolerable for many people due to its explosive, rather gruelling nature.

Others still might focus on increasing profiles of activity in everyday life – more gardening, say, or walking to work – rather than embarking on structured exercise routines.



No pain, no gain San Diego Shooter/flickr, CC BY

Can you keep up?

But the answer to the original question is simple. The best type of exercise for losing weight is the one that you will actually do.

Most people will not sustain a behaviour from which they derive no pleasure. The incentives for losing weight are obvious, but human behaviour is unpredictable when pleasure is involved. The optimum approach is probably to combine different types of exercise to receive the benefit of each. Alongside this, some form of conscious control over energy intake must be considered because the reality for many is that a considerable volume of exercise is required to significantly reduce body fat.

Exercise-induced weight loss also varies markedly between individuals, with behavioural, biological and genetic factors also playing their part. However, judging exercise solely by its effects on body weight might be damaging since exercise provides a plethora of other benefits.

We are designed to move and as such must respect our genes or accept the consequences. Arguably we should stop focusing on the optimum approach to exercise and find an approach that we might deem to be “good enough”.



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