

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Exercise Questionable for Weight Loss”

Those pushing gym workouts say it is essential for weight loss but, an international study led by Loyola University Chicago is providing compelling new evidence that exercise may not be the key to controlling weight. To the contrary, it has been said, "If weight is your concern, you're much more likely to lose it in your kitchen than you are in your gym." No doubt, exercise has repeatedly been shown to have a wide spectrum of health benefits, but weight loss does not appear to be one of them. Experts claim it is time to "bust the myth" that exercise is the key to tackling obesity. Instead, many say sugar and carbohydrates are the key. Researchers who studied young adults from the United States and four other countries found that neither physical activity nor sedentary time were associated with weight gain. Author, Lara R. Dugas, PhD, MPH. said, "Our study results indicate that physical activity may not protect you from gaining weight." But please remember that physical activity has many proven health benefits, ranging from reducing the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer to improving mental health and mood. People who are physically active tend to be healthier and live longer. But while physical activity burns calories, it also increases appetite, and people may compensate by eating more or by being less active the rest of the day. Some experts have suggested that a decline in physical activity (being sedentary), especially in the workplace, has been a key contributor to the obesity epidemic. But, research such as the new Loyola study, in which physical activity is objectively measured and participants are followed over time, has not found a meaningful relationship between weight gain and physical activity. Still, the U.S. Surgeon General physical activity guidelines recommend doing at least two and a half hours of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise (such as brisk walking) per week. Unexpectedly, total weight gain in every country was greater among participants who met the physical activity guidelines. Previous research has found that when people are asked about their physical activity, they tend to overstate the amount they do. Researchers did not find any significant relationships between sedentary time at the initial visit and subsequent weight gain or weight loss. The only factors that were significantly associated with weight gain were weight at the initial visit, age and gender. Some authors blamed the food industry for encouraging the belief that exercise could counteract the impact of unhealthy eating.

In the America that I love, we know that you can't outrun your forks. Arguably, physical activity has little role in combating obesity and instead public health messages should primarily focus on healthy eating, encouraging you to eat less.

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