

Could Your Sex Life Be Messing With Your Workouts?

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Lots of fighters abstain from sex the night (or the week) before a fight. (Image: EpicStockMedia/iStock/GettyImages)

Can having sex before an intense workout or race affect your athletic performance? Well, that all depends on who you ask. There are several theories about the impact sex has on exercise, and while [a 2017 study](#) concluded that chronic strenuous exercise can lower a guy's libido, not as much is known about the impact sex has on your workouts and athletic performance.

So the real question is whether or not spending some time between the sheets leads to a less-than-stellar workout the next day?" Best guess: probably not.

Where Does This Idea Come From?

Much of what has been written about the impact sex has on exercise is anecdotal and rooted in myths passed on from different traditions. Take boxing, for example. Olympic medalist and UFC champion Ronda Rousey told Jim Rome of SHOWTIME Sports that she

has “as much sex as possible” the night before a big fight. On the other hand, Muhammad Ali was known to say no to sex before stepping in the ring.

Both are world-class athletes with winning records, so who’s right? That seems to be the burning question.

Whether it’s the belief that sex will deplete valuable levels of testosterone, distract an athlete from focusing on a given sport or simply drain a person of the energy needed to get through an intense workout, the idea that sex negatively impacts exercise performance has been around for hundreds — or even thousands — of years.

“I suppose if there is anything like an old wives tale in sports, the notion that having sex the night before an athletic performance will weaken the athlete would be at the top of the list,” says Lawrence Siegel, Ph.D., a clinical sexologist and sexuality education consultant.

“This can be traced back to Aristotle, who believed that orgasm robbed one of vitality and warned athletes against having intercourse before an event.”



Maybe right before a workout isn’t the best time for a romp between the sheets. (Image: KatarzynaBialasiewicz/iStock/GettyImages)

The Pros and Cons of Sex Before Workouts

Despite these deep-rooted beliefs, very few scientific studies (especially large-scale ones)

have examined how sex can improve or impair athletic performance. So we let the experts weigh in with their thoughts about sexual activity in the days (and hours) leading up to a workout or athletic event.

PRO: Help From Hormones

“A number of findings indicate that it can actually enhance performance — both physically and psychologically,” says Dr. Siegel. “Sex the night before can produce effects like increased androgens (especially testosterone and DHEA), reduces the release of substance P (which reduces the pain response), increases muscle recovery and promotes a sense of well-being and stress reduction that can improve one’s performance.”

CON: Decreased Strength

“If sexual activity occurs less than two hours before the event, a negative impact has been observed,” says Paul Arciero, exercise physiologist and director of the Human Nutrition and Metabolism Laboratory in the Health and Exercise Sciences Department at Skidmore College in New York.

“A possible concern is the negative effect of sexual activity on muscular strength and performance as measured by a handgrip test the morning after sexual activity.”

PRO: Abstinence Lowers Testosterone

“Some professional boxers still practice a regimen of six weeks of abstinence before a fight, thinking this will add to their physical prowess,” says Dr. Siegel. “Research has shown, however, that long-term abstinence actually lowers testosterone levels and inhibits muscle mass.”

CON: Inconsistency in Training

“It’s more important that athletes maintain their usual/normal sexual activity surrounding their competition as to not affect their emotional well-being and, thus, performance,” says Arciero. “Consistency of normal routine is important when it comes to sexual activity and athletic performance.”

PRO: Sex Is a Workout Too!

“What it comes down to is the particular activity or workout a person is doing and, more importantly, the individual!” says Rachel Needle, Psy.D., executive director of Modern Sex Therapy Institutes.

“Try it out both ways (sex prior to the workout and abstaining beforehand) and see how

you feel and perform in the workout or sport afterward. If you exert a lot of energy during sexual activity, be sure to refuel. Sex is good for you and can help you get in and stay in shape.”

What Do YOU Think?

Has sex impacted your workouts? Do you notice a difference if you release some pent-up energy before heading to the gym, or do you find you hit it harder if you abstain from a little action between the sheets? Share your thoughts, questions and stories in the comments below!