

MEDIA RELEASE & EXPERT SPOKESPERSON AVAILABILITY

A Weighty Issue: Taking TV to Task for Advocating Extreme Exercise

Obesity levels in Australia are at epidemic proportions. So is it safe to say that *any* efforts to get our nation off the couch and get fit – including popular TV extreme-makeover shows such as “The Biggest Loser” – are beneficial?

Just the opposite, according to Exercise & Sports Science Australia’s (ESSA) Executive Officer, Anita Hobson-Powell, who believes the frequency and exertions of the exercise imposed upon contestants by the show’s assembled team of professionals are both risky and unhealthy.

“Programs such as *The Biggest Loser* which is scheduled to start this Sunday, promote the concept that if the show’s ‘everyman’ contestants can achieve dramatic and expedited weight loss, we all can,” said Ms Hobson-Powell.

“While the premise of the show is positive, pursuing health benefits through exercise, nutrition and psychological support, the reality is that injuries can occur from performing exercises incorrectly, old injuries can be exacerbated, and grave physical consequences can result from overexertion.”

“Going from sedentary to active is admirable – but should be undertaken in small steps. For those commencing a fitness regime, a gradual ramp-up, appropriate to one’s health history is recommended. What’s more, for those who are deemed obese or overweight, partnership with a GP is highly recommended.”

“For those seeking to take the kilos off, the mantra should be: take it slow, and partner with a pro.”

ESSA also recommends ongoing exercise management and counselling from an Accredited Exercise Physiologist for those who suffer from existing medical conditions or have at-risk health factors, as recognised by Medicare.

“It’s unrealistic to expect an inactive person to come off the couch and plunge headfirst into a strenuous daily exercise regime,” Ms Hobson-Powell continued.

“Shows like *The Biggest Loser* provide an edited version of contestants’ daily activities, but the parameters are clear: exercise hard, for long stretches and to the brink of your capacity. For the viewer watching at home, this is an irresponsible message to send – not to mention unrealistic, given the number of hours contestants devote to fitness each day.”

“These extreme, unsustainable measures should not be attempted at home or without professional supervision.”



Ms Hobson-Powell noted that shows like “The Biggest Loser” also invoke a style of intimidation and humiliation that can result in reduced self-esteem.

“A fitness professional’s goal should not be to intimidate, but rather to support, motivate and guide clients using recognised healthy standards.”

“The average person does not have access to the resources such extreme makeover shows provide. It’s all well and good to watch your favourite contestants’ kilos slip away,” said Ms Hobson-Powell.

“But not everyone has the benefit of a dream team of professionals that are designing, supporting and monitoring your progress.”

And if you’re still unconvinced – and considering trying an extreme fitness regime, you may be wasting your time.

“Losing weight quickly, as *The Biggest Loser* promotes, is typically unsustainable,” according to Ms Hobson-Powell.

“Slow and steady wins the race.”

To learn more about ESSA’s recommendations on physical activity please visit www.exerciseismedicine.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/PA-guidelines-under-65-v2.pdf.

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For further media information, please contact Maya from Fresh PR & Marketing on 0410 109 102 or email maya@freshprm.com.au. Expert spokesperson Anita Hobson-Powell is also available for interview.



ABOUT ESSA

Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA) is the peak professional body for exercise and sports science in Australia, and provides national leadership and advocacy on key issues. ESSA supports its 3,500+ members and the community by fostering excellence in professional practice, education, training and research.

Website: www.essa.org.au



ABOUT EXERCISE IS MEDICINE®

Exercise is Medicine®, as an initiative of Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA), aims to make physical activity and exercise a standard part of a disease prevention and treatment paradigm in Australia, improving community health and reducing long-term health care costs. The program hopes to make every Australian doctor consider physical activity and exercise as a standard part of treatment programs, resulting in more prescribed exercise for the prevention or treatment of chronic conditions.

The three guiding principles of Exercise is Medicine® Australia are designed to improve the health and well being of all Australians through regular physical activity prescription from doctors and other allied health providers. The guiding principles include:

- Physical activity and exercise are important to health, and to the prevention and treatment of many chronic diseases;
- More should be done to address physical activity and exercise in health care settings; and
- Doctors should support the referral of patients to appropriately trained allied health professionals to deliver exercise treatment services.

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