

# EXPOSING THE MYTHS C

By Loretta Mostofi  
Photos: Dallas Olsen

During my competitive career I have come across many negative views and articles regarding figure competitions. There are so many conflicting opinions circulating that I felt compelled to compile a list of myths and misconceptions, drawn from my personal experience.

## YOU HAVE TO STARVE YOURSELF TO OBTAIN A COMPETITION PHYSIQUE

**1** Figure competitors generally eat more than the average female. They also eat more frequently; usually six times a day. This clearly does not equate to starvation. I often get told, "But you don't eat any carbohydrates!" This is absolutely incorrect! Oats, sweet potato and rice are all great sources of carbohydrates and are an integral element of the figure competitor's nutrition plan. Good fats, such as those found in nuts, avocados and fish, are also essential.

These are exactly the kinds of foods a nutritionist would prescribe to the average person for a healthy diet. In my own experience of competitive preparation, there were only two days in the entire 20-week program that my carb intake was restricted. On these days, carbohydrates were limited to my morning meals only. These were considered my 'depletion days'. On every other day, carbohydrates were an important part of my daily nutrition. Although everyone's preparation is different, the number of carb-free days is generally minimal.

## YOU HAVE TO DO HOURS OF DAILY EXERCISE

**2** Wrong again! It is often thought that we spend hours at the gym every day. Personally, I actually spend less time training in the on-season than in the off-season. Only in the final weeks leading up to a competition will I introduce an extra cardio session, and this is largely dependent on how my body is responding.

When you are preparing for a competition, the amount of exercise you do is determined in reference to your nutrition plan. This is a calculated ratio, vital to preserving your lean muscle mass. Excessive exercise and inadequate nutritional intake is, in fact, the perfect recipe for reversing any muscle gain you may have achieved during the off-season. This is something that all good competitors avoid at all costs.

## YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO MAINTAIN YOUR COMPETITION PHYSIQUE ALL YEAR ROUND

**3** Most people believe that figure competitors maintain their competition body all year round. We sometimes hear comments that suggest we look awful, and many wonder why we would choose to look the way we do. I must stress that our full competition physique is only maintained for a small period of time, in fact, for the 10-minute period we are on stage.

Figure competition is a sport and must be respected as such. Consider jockeys, for instance, who also have an on-season and an off-season. Similar to figure competitors, they manipulate their diet and nutrition in order to achieve their weight requirements for race day. They follow a specific diet on competition day and return to a normal nutrition plan afterwards. Figure competitors follow a similar routine, whereby they use natural alternatives to preserve health and be stage-ready on competition day. Once it is over, we smooth over our muscle definition within hours. Figure competition is a sport, and like many others, requires specific preparation techniques in the lead-up to competition day.



# OF FIGURE COMPETITION

“We choose to eliminate certain foods for a set period of time because we are preparing for a competition, not because they are bad.”

## YOU SHOULD NOT PUT ON ANY WEIGHT AFTER COMPETING

**4** This is virtually impossible and unhealthy to maintain. It is no secret that, as part of the sport, in the days following a competition our body fat is very low. However, it is never encouraged that we remain this way. It is vital for our health, and sanity, to regain some weight. Rather than looking at figure competitors as being “fat” for failing to preserve their low body-fat physiques, try to appreciate the fact that they regard it as a sport and never strive to maintain their competitive physique long-term. Anyone who enters this sport with the intent to do so is of the wrong mentality, and is setting themselves up for a downward spiral into depression and self-loathing. We are healthy individuals who have a passion to work hard in creating perfect symmetry, but for competition only.

## YOU SHOULD CONTINUE TO EAT THE SAME WAY ALL YEAR ROUND

**5** Anyone who attempts to do this is fooling themselves. Once the competition season is over, it is essential to give your body and mind the rest and nourishment they deserve. Any dedicated competitor knows that having an off-season is crucial. It gives you the time to improve your weaknesses so that you may better your physique for future competitions. Carrying some extra weight enables you to push yourself harder in the gym so that you can make the necessary gains. A good friend and successful competitor once said to me, “All the hard work is in the off-season”.

Trying to maintain an on-season meal plan all year round also becomes mentally challenging when you are tempted to veer off plan, which is inevitable. We are only human. It also leaves you little room to nutritionally challenge your body when it is time to get lean during competition.

## YOU SHOULD NEVER EAT ANYTHING LABELLED AS ‘BAD’

**6** Nothing should, in fact, be labelled as ‘bad’. We choose to eliminate certain foods for a set period of time because we are preparing for a competition, not because they are bad.

During the on-season, and more frequently throughout the off-season, we do eat ‘occasional foods’, which many would classify as being ‘bad’. It is a mistake to assume a competitor who is indulging in food has failed. They are simply living life in balance and moderation.

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**ONE CAN DAMAGE THEIR HEALTH AS A SIDE-EFFECT OF COMPETING**

**7** For a natural competitor, this is incorrect. Eating good, nutritious food six times a day, with the inclusion of 'occasional foods', does not adversely affect our health. Compare this to the average person who skips meals and eats highly processed, salty and sugary foods on a daily basis.

We are often criticised during our final week of preparation, as we go through carb, salt and water depletion and loading phases. People claim this could not possibly be good for our health. Again, similar to jockeys, who restrict their diet leading up to race day, or even sumo wrestlers, who eat more as they approach competition days, figure competitors manipulate their bodies for only a short period, in the days leading up to the stage show. This is highly transient and does not come close to comparing to the many individuals out there who abuse their bodies with drugs and alcohol on a regular basis. It may be worth considering who is more likely to develop long-term health issues.

**ONLY WOMEN WITH EATING DISORDERS COMPETE**

**8** How could we have eating disorders when we eat so frequently throughout the day? Being determined, motivated, disciplined and committed are characteristics of a person with dreams to chase, desires to succeed, and a drive to complete a journey. The figure competitor is a person with the ambition and self-discipline to attempt to achieve the impossible. These are all characteristics contrary to those usually found in people with eating disorders and illnesses.

**COMPETITORS HAVE NO SOCIAL LIFE**

**10** Just because we compete does not mean we live in a bubble. Socialising with friends and family does not have to revolve around food and drink. In fact, I have enjoyed a family holiday overseas and other special events, such as my husband's 40th birthday, by being smart and conscientious. Calling a restaurant in advance to ensure they can cater to my dietary requirements enables me to enjoy going out and being social.

**YOU HAVE TO CONSUME EXCESSIVE AMOUNTS OF SUPPLEMENTS AND PROTEIN POWDERS**

**9** Yes, we do take supplements pre-, during and post-workout to help build and repair muscle. However, healthy, structured preparation under the guidance of a qualified coach actually strips such supplements from a competitive program in the weeks nearing competition day. These are replaced by food, such as extra eggs, chicken, fish and steak.

**“I actually spend less time training in the on-season than in the off-season.”**

Do not pity us for missing out as we have decided to take this journey. Living this way is not a need or requirement, it is a passion. Please respect and support the choices we make. ....

My advice to anyone interested in competing is to do some research. Find a good qualified coach who will nurture your health, give you advice and support and guide you through both the on- and off-season. Good Luck! .....



**“Eat Healthy, Keep Moving and Believe in Yourself”**  
**Loretta Mostofi**  
**Australian and World Figure Champion**  
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