



Your magazine is fantastic, inspirational and really helpful! Here's to many more years! @jazii_louise, via Instagram

Fitspo OR FIT FAIL?

You think it's helping you achieve your goals, but social media fitness inspiration could actually be messing with your workout mojo

PICTURE THIS. It's Thursday night. It's raining. You promised yourself you'd go for a run but a session with the TV is looking far more appealing. Your fingers close around your phone and you find yourself scanning Instagram. As you're scrolling, @FitIsSexy posts a pic of the best looking pair of pins you've seen in months paired with the words: "Do something that makes you sweat". Scroll further and you're faced with slogans like "Stop saying I wish, and start saying I will" and "Sweat + sacrifice = success". So, how do you feel? Inspired enough to hit the road for a run, or more inclined to curl up in a ball with the remote?

*** Hello #fitspo**
If you use social media (Ha! Who are we kidding? We know you do) chances are you're familiar with the cult of fitspiration, or fitspo. Whether it's through a hashtag you search or a friend whose pics of her new puppy have given way to sweaty gym-gear selfies, you've probably seen it come up on your radar. At its core, fitspo is designed as an easily accessible tool that pairs words and images together to create a neat, motivational package.

"Fitspo is really a combination of some positive health messages and some unhealthy but common body-image ideals," says psychologist Glenn Macintosh of the Wesley Life Shape Clinic. The messages are the kind you may get from a trainer, friend or partner, which in itself isn't anything new (we've all had that PT who sends us 'psyche up' texts of a Sunday evening, haven't we?). What's unique about fitspo, however, is the way those messages have been combined with a select type of image, meant to kick those motivation levels up a notch.

Women's food and wellness coach and creator of the Ultimate 30-Day Kickstart Program and Detox, Adriana Solorzano, explains: "Fitspo is meant to help women get inspired to live a healthier, active lifestyle, and using images of super fit and toned women is supposed to help your motivation levels, particularly on occasions when working out is the last thing you feel like."

*** Picture perfect?**
Given our ever-increasing love affair with social media, it's easy to understand how this trend has infiltrated the fitness space so quickly. The recent 2013 Yellow Social Media Report confirmed what most of us already know; the fairer sex are big fans

"Role models are great for inspiration, but be careful who you choose"

of getting social on the net. Women are also more likely than their male counterparts to use social media and are also more likely to be online multiple times a day. While a whopping 98 per cent of social-media savvy ladies are on Facebook, the rise in popularity of Instagram and Pinterest, which 17 per cent and 11 per cent of us are signed up to respectively, is indicative of the shift towards image-based media. We 'Insta' everything from our coffee cups to our dinner plates and it's not surprising that our bodies (and how we treat them) are prime fodder for sharing.

*** Fitspo vs thinspo**
So what's the big difference between sharing a snap of yourself pounding the pavement at sunrise and a pic of a pair of insanely toned glutes in teeny, tiny shorts sweating it out while tackling a set of stairs? It seems that it comes down to the realism of each image and the way it's framed.

While one image may present a realistic view of what fitness actually looks like, the other is more reflective of the perceived ideal body. It's that type of framing that has led to the inevitable comparisons between fitspo and thinspo, the highly controversial trend of sharing images of women with extremely low body weights. But is fitspo just thinspo dressed in a pair of tights? No, argues Adriana. "Thinspo is about getting skinny at any cost. Fitspo genuinely wants to inspire women to get fit," she says.

But these pictures still need to be taken with a grain of salt. "We need to remember that the images are of models, whose job it is to look immaculate," Adriana adds. Glenn tends to agree: "Fitspo seems to be a move in the right direction, but many of the images can still promote unhealthy body ideals, strict dieting and exercise addiction."

*** Heathspo?**
So can fitspo be part of our motivational tool-bag? "It really depends on the existing relationship a woman has with her body," Adriana says. "If you're already working out and want to take it up to the next level, fitspo can be a great inspiration. If you're at the start of your journey, though, these images can sometimes leave women feeling like they are just way too far off their goal."

It boils down to a combination of self-esteem, the kind of images you find and the way you're using them. "Stick to images of naturally healthy women," Glenn suggests. "Maybe 'healthspo' is a better evolution that we could work towards." And be realistic. "Role models are fantastic for inspiration, but be careful who you choose," Adriana suggests. "Find a role model who has a similar body type and lifestyle to your own." By ensuring a healthy dose of reality is added to the mix, you might just be able to get your fitspo, without a side of guilt. **W**

WF & FITSPO
Check out Women's Fitness on Instagram for examples of great fitness inspiration!



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Did you know? The typical Australian Facebooker spends more than seven hours a week cruising the social media site. Imagine if we spent that time in the gym ...

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