Do those electronic muscle toners do squat? [1]

Dear Alice,

I know most of us have seen the ads to buy various muscle toning equipment that uses electric pulses to "build more tissue" (hypertrophy), and I was wondering what you thought about this way of "toning muscle." Also, if you knew where else I could go to further my research on these sorts of devices?

Thank you very much for your help in advance.

Answer

Dear Reader,

The ads for electric muscle toners make them sound like the best invention since the vibrator? strap on the device and zap yourself to rock-hard abs? no effort, no sweat, and no dreaded crunches. However, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the buzz over electronic muscle toners provides more hype than real hope for those who want to strengthen and tone muscles. The FDA has approved the use of electronic muscle stimulators to prevent and/or treat some medical conditions, including:

- Muscle spasms
- Muscle atrophy
- Decreased range of motion

Typically, electronic muscle toners are used as a temporary fix to help people who have had a serious injury or some underlying medical problem or condition (such as those who have had a stroke or had major surgery) rebuild or retain muscle strength and function. When used as directed by physical therapists and rehabilitation specialists, electronic muscle stimulators can help those with muscle injury recover. However, there is no evidence that these devices can sculpt and strengthen flabby, but otherwise healthy, muscles, help people lose weight or burn fat, or develop "muscles of steel."

There have also been reports of people receiving electronic shocks, burns, and skin irritation from improperly made or unregulated electronic muscle stimulators. For more information about the potential risks and benefits, you can check out the FDA's web page of Consumer Information on Electronic Muscle Stimulators [2].
In the meantime, if you're looking for "six-pack abs" above your belt, you'll have better results going for the slow, arduous exercise burn rather than a quick electronic zap.

Alice!

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