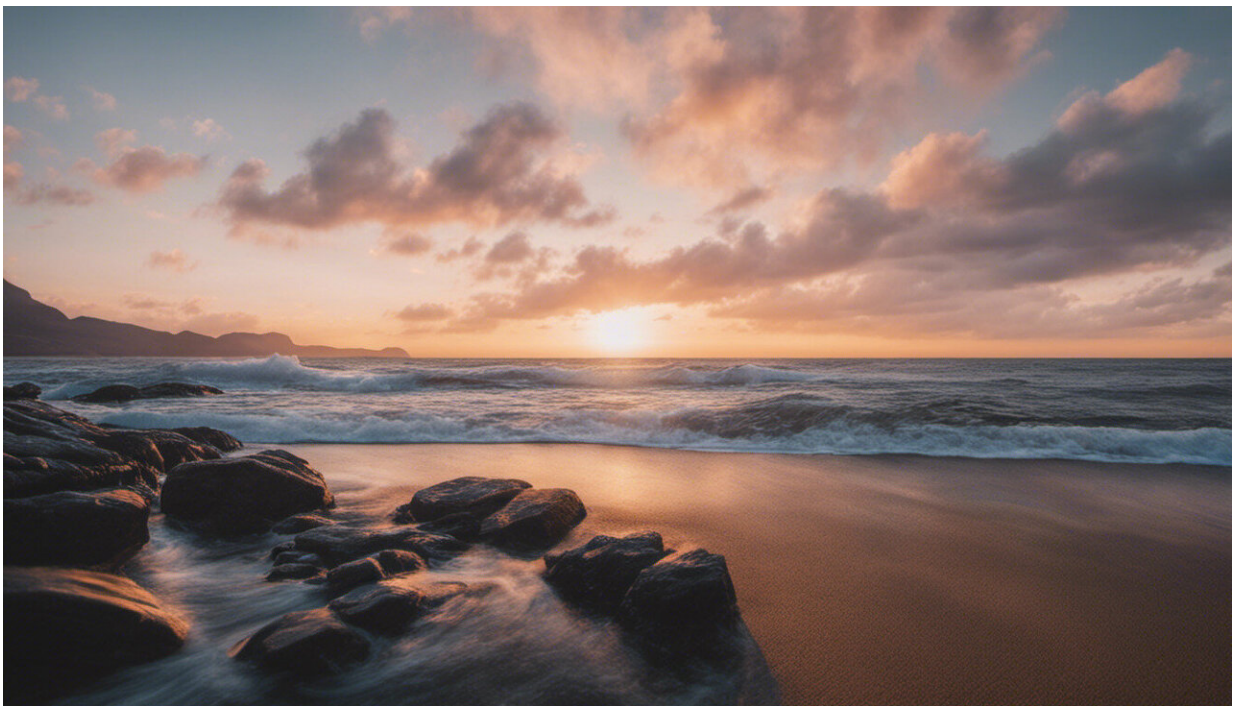


Top 100 fitspiration influencers are more talk than walk when it comes to body image, find researchers

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

They're the tanned, toned bodies sporting the latest fitness fashion, but when it comes to body image these "fitspiration" influencers are more talk than walk, according to world-first research from the University of South Australia.

In an audit of the leading Instagram fitspiration accounts, UniSA researchers found that nearly two thirds of the top 100 influencers published dubious fitness information, with around a quarter presenting hyper-sexualised content, objectification, or nudity.

Fitspiration accounts are used by health and [exercise](#) influencers who post content empowering individuals to pursue [healthy lifestyles](#). Currently, popular fitness inspiration hashtags on Instagram, such as #fitspiration and #fitspo, appear in over 100 million posts.

Lead researcher, UniSA's Dr. Rachel Curtis says the lack of reliable, credible health and fitness content on a platform which has more than 1.3 billion users globally is concerning, especially when it comes to body image and self-esteem.

"Scroll through #fitspiration or #fitspo on your Instagram feed and you'll be bombarded with images of thin and athletic women promoting exercise, fitness and healthy lifestyles," Dr. Curtis says.

"On face value, sharing inspirational photos, videos, and quotes about [fitness](#) and [healthy eating](#) should increase exercise behavior and well-being, yet we're beginning to see that this might not be the case.

"In this research we found that many fitspiration accounts contained hyper-sexualised images and videos, as well as potentially harmful or unhealthy content.

"Many of the accounts promoted unhealthy or unrealistic body shapes—with a strong focus on ultra-fit, slim physiques—implying that only thin and toned bodies are considered healthy and beautiful. Such a focus on appearance can drive outward-based reasons to exercise, and this can lead to body image issues and concerns."

Senior researcher, UniSA's Professor Carol Maher says a unique outcome of the study is an evidence-based audit tool for Instagram fitspiration accounts.

"Many people look to social platforms, such as Instagram, for information and motivation to exercise, which means we need to be mindful of the content that is being presented," Prof Maher says.

"This study helped us develop a reliable audit tool that can help identify credible and non-credible exercise and health Instagram accounts. If credible accounts can be identified, they might present an avenue for wide-reaching, engaging public health campaigns to promote physical activity."

The work is published in the journal *BMC Public Health*.

More information: Rachel G Curtis et al, Hashtag fitspiration: credibility screening and content analysis of Instagram fitness accounts, *BMC Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-023-15232-7](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15232-7)

Provided by University of South Australia

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