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Share the Wellness Tip

A Weight Has Been Lifted, Now Do It Again

Weight lifting — sometimes called strength training or resistance exercise — is not just for bodybuilders or well-toned athletes. As evidence builds about the health and fitness benefits of strength training, women and men of all ages are taking time to pump a little iron.

The Benefits

Adults typically lose 20 to 40 percent of their muscle tissue as they age. This can sap strength and speed up bone loss. Weight lifting helps slow, and even reverse this process, decreasing the likelihood of osteoporosis and disability. As the body replaces fat with muscle, which weighs more, the bones grow and strengthen to carry the heavier load. Strength training also may help keep weight in check. How? Muscle burns more calories than fat does.

Research has shown that strengthening exercises are both safe and effective for women and men of all ages, including those who are not in perfect health. In fact, people with health concerns — including heart disease or arthritis — often benefit the most from an exercise program that includes lifting weights a few times each week. Be sure to talk to your doctor before starting strength training if you have a serious condition, such as heart disease or arthritis.

Choosing the Equipment

- **Free weights.** Dumbbells, barbells and ankle weights can make for an inexpensive way to work-out at home. They also lend themselves to a great variety of exercise routines.
- **Body weight.** You can do many exercises with little or no equipment. Try push-ups, pull-ups, abdominal crunches and leg squats.
- **Resistance tubing.** Resistance tubing is inexpensive, lightweight tubing that provides resistance when stretched. You can choose from many types of resistance tubes in nearly any sporting goods store.

Tips to Get Started

- Set aside 20 to 40 minute, two to three times a week. Remember, weight training is only one part of a total fitness program. You also need to make time for aerobic exercise, such as brisk walking, to get your heart and lungs working. Taking time to stretch is also important.
- Develop a routine that works the major muscle groups: shoulders, arms, chest, abdomen, back, hips and legs. For each exercise, do 8 to 15 repetitions. Rest a minute and do another set.
- Choose a weight heavy enough to make you fatigued after 8 to 15 repetitions. If you can't lift a weight eight times in a row, begin with a lighter one. Once you can lift it easily 15 times, increase the weight.
- Perform each exercise slowly and smoothly. Take two to three seconds to lift, and four to six seconds to lower the weight.
- Exhale as you lift, and inhale as you lower the weight.
- It's normal to feel a bit tired and even a little sore for a few days after you begin weight lifting. But take time off if you feel exhausted, pull a muscle or experience sore joints.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Mayo Clinic

