

FitFacts®

Energize Your Life with Strength Training

ARE YOU LIVING THE LIFE YOU WANT TO LIVE? IS A DECREASE IN YOUR PHYSICAL STRENGTH AND ENERGY GETTING IN THE WAY OF ENJOYING YOUR FAVORITE ACTIVITIES? REGULAR CARDIOVASCULAR EXERCISE IS A WELL-KNOWN WAY TO PRESERVE STAMINA AND TO PREVENT CHRONIC DISEASE THAT CAN SLOW YOU DOWN. BUT AN INCREASING NUMBER OF OLDER ADULTS PRACTICE STRENGTH TRAINING (USING RESISTANCE BANDS, WEIGHT MACHINES, BODY WEIGHT, OR LIFTING WEIGHTS) AS AN EFFECTIVE HEALTH-BOOSTING STRATEGY.

Men and women of any age can benefit from strength training. Having a chronic medical condition doesn't mean you can't do strength exercises. If you're living with heart disease, arthritis or diabetes, strength training may even help improve your condition.

ARE YOU LOSING MUSCLE TISSUE?

Experts point out that many of the changes associated with getting older are actually due to becoming less active with age. Unless you regularly engage in activities to strengthen your muscles, you'll lose about a half a pound of muscle a year in your 30s and 40s, and that rate can double once you turn 50. As you lose muscle, you lose strength, and that compromises your ability to do even simple things, such as carrying your groceries, getting up from a seated position or gardening. Your metabolism also slows down as you lose muscle, so your body will need fewer calories to maintain itself, and you're likely to gain excess body fat, unless you eat less. And excess fat contributes to a multitude of health problems: heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

14 GOOD REASONS TO PUMP IRON

It doesn't matter, if you're 50 years old or 80, studies show that strength training can help:

1. Maintain your independence as you get older
2. Improve your quality of life, allowing you to do the things you enjoy with less effort
3. Strengthen and preserve your muscle tissue
4. Strengthen your bones
5. Reduce your risk of falling
6. Improve control of blood sugar
7. Increase your metabolism
8. Improve your body composition to less fat and more muscle
9. Reduce your resting blood pressure
10. Speed up the rate at which food moves through your digestive system, reducing risk of colon cancer
11. Reduce your risk of low back injury

12. Elevate your mood and your self-confidence
13. Relieve pain from osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis
14. Enhance recovery from stroke or heart attack

HOW TO GET STARTED

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend strength training on two or more days a week with [exercises](#) that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms).

Because everyone's needs and limitations are different, talk to your health care provider before you begin strength training. Find out, if there are specific activities you should avoid, or any special precautions to follow. Next, decide if you'd like to do strength exercises at home, at a community center, or at a gym. For some beginners, the supervision and camaraderie found in a group fitness class is an ideal combination.

If you'd rather work out on your own, consider scheduling a few sessions with a [certified personal trainer](#), ideally, someone specializing in older adult fitness. You'll receive a program tailored to your needs and interests and supervision to make sure you're performing the exercises correctly. While strength training offers serious health benefits, improper form or technique can lead to injuries.

BUDDY UP

For best results, invite a friend or family member to do strength exercises with you. Besides being more fun, it'll help keep you accountable for sticking with it. You'll inspire one another as you get stronger, and push one another to reach goals. The importance of social support can't be overemphasized when it comes to adopting new health behaviors.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[National Institute on Aging](#)

[American College of Sports Medicine](#)