



Strength Training

Some of us have been around long enough to remember when strength training was reserved for professional body builders, and the occasional non-pro who for some reason wanted to look like them. For the rest of us it didn't make much sense. Thanks but no thanks. It even carried with it the stigma of brawn over brain, something practiced by the less cerebral among us, while everyone else pursued the finer points of art and literature.

Since then, we've come to realize that strength training indeed makes a lot of sense. And it's now recognized as an essential part of any fitness program.

Strength training uses resistance methods like free weights, weight machines, and resistance bands to build muscle and strength.

In study after study, those who included weight training in their routines became stronger, gained muscle, lost body fat, had less depression, and had more self-confidence. Who among us would say no thanks to any of that? The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has given strength training the official mainstream nod for quite some time now, noting its numerous benefits as a regular feature of our exercise programs. This list gets increasingly remarkable as it progresses.

Improved Weight Maintenance—Strength training adds muscle, and adding muscle is crucial to weight control. This may seem at first to defy logic, until we understand the differences between muscle and fat. While fat uses very little energy when stored, muscle actually increases our metabolic rate. In other words, muscle burns away fat. Strength training can provide up to a 15% increase in metabolic (fat-burning) rate.

Improved Glucose Control--More than 14 million Americans have type II diabetes--and the number is steadily climbing. Fortunately, studies now show that strength training can have a profound impact on helping adults manage their diabetes. A recent study found that 16 weeks of strength training produced dramatic improvements in glucose control. The results were found to be comparable to taking diabetes medication.

Healthy State of Mind---Strength training decreases the symptoms of depression, similar to the way anti-depressant medications do. Currently, it is not known if this is because people feel better when they are stronger, or if biochemical change in the brain is created. Maybe it's a combination of the two. In the meantime, if we end up happier and healthier, who really cares why?

Sleep Improvement-- People who exercise regularly enjoy improved sleep quality. They fall asleep more quickly, sleep more deeply, awaken less often, and

sleep longer. As with depression, the sleep benefits obtained as a result of strength training are comparable to treatment with medication but without the side effects or the expense. By this time you are probably telling yourself that any one of these benefits alone is worth the effort of weight training. And yet, there's more...

Bone Strengthening--Post-menopausal women can lose 1-2% of their bone mass annually. A study conducted at Tufts University showed that strength training increases bone density and reduces the risk for fractures among women.

Healthier Heart Tissue-- the American Heart Association recommends strength training as a way to reduce the risk of heart disease. Strength training is important for cardiac health because heart disease risk is lower when the body is leaner.

Slowing the Aging Process--Scientific research has shown that exercise can slow physiological aging. Lifting weights two or three times a week increases strength by building muscle mass and bone density.

Arthritis Relief--In a recent Tufts University study, older men and women with moderate to severe knee osteoarthritis completed a strength-training program. The results showed that strength training decreased pain by 43%, increased muscle strength and general physical performance, improved the clinical signs and symptoms of the disease, and decreased disability. Strength training proved to be at least as potent as medication in easing the pain of osteoarthritis.

Balance and Reduction of Falls--As people age, poor balance and flexibility contribute to falls and broken bones. One New Zealand study of women 80 years of age and older showed a 40% reduction in falls with simple strength and balance training.

Myths Regarding Strength Training.

Shifting gears a bit here, we'll address some of the nay-sayer concerns with weight training, because it has more than its share of perceived downsides. However, as the title of this section suggests, they are mostly unfounded concerns and easily dismissed with fact and reason:

- *Myth: strength training will create large, unattractive muscles in women.*
Fact: for the vast majority of women, this is genetically impossible.
- *Myth: many repetitions with very low weight is the right way for women to lift weights.* Fact: in order for a muscle to become stronger, you must lift enough weight to create muscle fatigue.

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- *Myth: strength training is very time consuming.* Fact: most fitness experts agree that thirty minutes 2-3 times each week is adequate to strengthen and build muscle. TIPS: Work to increase the effectiveness of your training, if time is at a premium. You can do this by working several muscles with one exercise. A great example of this is squats, which work the quadriceps, hamstrings, buttocks and calves at the same time. You can also limit your resting time between exercises. As you progress, look for ways to work more intensely, rather than adding more exercises.
- *Myth: strength training will turn your fat into muscle.* Fact: fat tissue and muscle tissue are different from each other. You cannot turn fat into muscle or vice versa.
- *Myth: strength training is only for young people.* Fact: it is never too late to improve your fitness level through a balanced exercise program that includes strength training.
- *Myth: strength training has to be expensive.* Fact: muscles respond to the stress applied to them. Dumbbells are just as effective as expensive machines.
- *Myth: the more protein you eat, the more muscle you will build.* Fact: excessive protein will be used for energy or converted to fat for storage. Your body needs to be in a positive protein state to build muscle. Your Barix nutritionist can help you determine an adequate protein level.

There are few things more satisfying than the feeling you get from a good workout. There are several options to help get you started. They include:

- Joining a fitness center, YMCA, or local gym;
- Utilizing a trainer;
- Renting or buying videos to teach you technique;
- Buying strength-training books or checking them out from your local library;
- Checking out community education programs;
- Trying local schools or colleges; they often open their facilities to the public.

Strength training should not be an optional part of your life. It should be a necessity. The benefits are too great to ignore. So find the program that is best suited for you and get started. It's a valuable lifestyle habit that will add energy, self-confidence, improved health, and years to your life.

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