

6 Reasons to Add Strength Training to Your Workout Plan

A complete workout plan should include strength training. Find out how strength training can really benefit you physically and emotionally.

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If you knew that a certain type of **exercise** could benefit your heart, improve your balance, **strengthen** your bones, and help you lose weight as it made you look and feel better, wouldn't you want to get started? Well, studies show that strength training can do all of that and more. Strength training is not just about bodybuilders lifting weights in a gym. It can benefit people of all ages and may be particularly important for people with health issues such as arthritis or a **heart condition**.

Strength Training: The Benefits

Yes, strength training will add definition to your muscles and give men and women alike more **fit** and toned bodies. But working out with weights does so much more:

1. Strength training protects bone health and muscle mass.

After puberty, whether you are a man or a woman, you begin to lose about 1 percent of your bone and muscle strength every year. "One of the best ways to stop, prevent, and even reverse bone and muscle loss is to add strength training to your **workouts**," advises Troy Tuttle, MS, an exercise physiologist at the University of Texas Medical School in Houston."

2. Strength training makes you stronger and fitter.

Strength training is also called resistance training because it involves strengthening and toning your muscles by contracting them against a resisting force. There are two types of resistance training:

- **Isometric resistance** involves contracting your muscles against a non-moving object, such as against the floor in a push-up.
- **Isotonic strength training** involves contracting your muscles through a range of motion as in weight lifting.

Both make you stronger and can get you into better shape. Remember that with strength training your muscles need time to recover, so it should only be done on alternate days. Always take some time to warm up and cool down after strength training.

3. Strength training helps you develop better body mechanics.

Strength training has benefits that go well beyond the appearance of nicely toned muscles. Your balance and coordination will improve, as will your posture. More importantly, if you have poor flexibility and balance, strength training can reduce your risk of falling by as much as 40 percent, a crucial benefit, especially as you get older.

4. Strength training plays a role in disease prevention.

Studies have documented the many wellness benefits of strength training. If you have arthritis, strength training can be as effective as medication in decreasing arthritis pain. Strength training can help post-menopausal women increase their bone density and reduce the risk of bone fractures. And for the 14 million Americans with type 2 diabetes, strength training along with other healthy lifestyle changes can help improve glucose control.

5. Strength training boosts energy levels and improves your mood.

Strength training will elevate your level of endorphins (natural opiates produced by the brain), which will make you feel great. As if that isn't enough to convince you, strength training has also been shown to be a great antidepressant, to help you sleep better, and to improve your overall quality of life.

6. Strength training translates to more calories burned.

You burn calories during strength training, and your body continues to burn calories after strength training, a process called "physiologic homework." More calories are used to make and maintain muscle than fat, and in fact strength training can boost your metabolism by 15 percent — that can really jumpstart a weight loss plan.

Strength Training: Getting Started

"Please don't limit yourself to thinking that lifting weights, expensive machines, or gym membership is the only way to do strength training," says Tuttle. "Pushups, jump squats, lunges, and mountain climbing are all examples of exercises that provide strength training."

If you have any health issues, ask your doctor what type of strength training is best to meet your needs and abilities. You can also work with a fitness expert to design a strength-training program that will be safe and effective for you.

Who doesn't want to look better, feel better, and live a longer, healthier life? So what are you waiting for? Get started now with a complete workout program that includes strength training.