

THE BENEFITS OF STRENGTH TRAINING

By: Dr. John A. Papa, DC

Strength training is exercise that uses resistance - for example, weights to strengthen and build our muscles. Strength training is used as a general term synonymous with other common terms such as “weightlifting” and “resistance training”. There are numerous health benefits to strength training regularly. It can be very powerful in preventing and reducing the signs and symptoms of numerous diseases and chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, arthritis, and mild depression. Strength training can also help individuals recover from and prevent injury, improve endurance, stamina, flexibility, balance and coordination. Unless an individual strength trains regularly, they will lose 0.5 pounds of muscle every year of their lives after the age of 25. This physiological fact of human aging can have a significant impact on health and well-being. Let’s take a closer look at how strength training is intricately related to health.

Strength training plays a key role in body composition and weight management. Muscle tissue requires approximately 25% of our energy (calories) to function. This has a direct effect on our Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR), which represents the energy used by the body at rest to maintain normal body functions. For individuals who do not strengthen and condition their muscles regularly, this means less muscle and therefore less energy being used for daily metabolic function. Calories that were previously necessary to perform the activities of daily living now end up stored as fat. Fat has a much lower BMR than muscle. Strength training will help increase BMR, improve body composition, reduce body fat and increase calorie expenditure at rest.



Strength training is safe and beneficial for reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease. Heart disease risk is lower when the body is leaner and less fat. Other associated benefits include decreased cholesterol levels and lowered resting blood pressure. Strength training will also help improve glucose metabolism. Poor glucose metabolism is strongly associated with adult onset diabetes.

There is strong scientific evidence that supports resistance training for reducing the rate of bone loss. Progressive resistance exercise helps stimulate bone mineral density development, which is desired for individuals of all ages, especially the elderly. Strength training is crucial at younger ages for maximizing bone density, and also for those looking to prevent or slow-down the bone-thinning disease osteoporosis. Strength training should be implemented as a standard component of any osteoporosis treatment or prevention program, as it decreases the likelihood of fractures and morbidity related to fractures.

Building muscle through strength training is helpful for recovering from and preventing injury. Well-conditioned muscles help strengthen our bodies to withstand occupational, recreational, and everyday stresses. This enables us to interact with our environment in a more efficient manner. Proper resistance training helps build

strength, endurance, stamina, flexibility, balance and coordination. This can be especially beneficial for those suffering from arthritis. Studies in older men and women with moderate to severe arthritis have shown that a strength training program can help general physical performance with everyday activities, and improve clinical signs and symptoms of the disease resulting in decreased pain and disability.

Strength training may also have a positive effect for those suffering from mild depression. The reason for this is most likely two-fold. Physiologically, the body releases “feel good” chemicals called endorphins with physical activity. Psychologically, exercise and strength training in particular help to increase self-esteem, confidence, and self-worth. These benefits are further reinforced with positive health-related results such as improved body composition, appearance, and enhanced health and fitness.



Strength training can be accomplished many different ways. Individuals may choose to join a health club where they can have access to conventional weight-training equipment. Strength training can also be performed at home with the use of hand-held or homemade weights. Resistance bands and tubing are another inexpensive option. These elastic cords offer weight-like resistance when you pull on them. An individual can also use their own body weight while performing push-ups, pull-ups, dips, abdominal crunches, stair climbing, lunges, and wall squats. Strength training should be appropriately geared toward the physical capabilities of the individual. Those unsure of where to start should consult with a knowledgeable health professional.

Modest benefits from strength training can be seen with two to three training sessions a week lasting just 20 to 30 minutes each. With regular strength training, the average individual can increase strength by 50% or more within six months. A resistance level heavy enough to tire your muscles after about 8 to 12 repetitions is sufficient. When you can easily do 12 or more repetitions of a certain exercise, increase the weight or resistance. Rest at least one full day between exercising each specific muscle group. Always perform strength training in a safe manner with proper technique and stop if you feel pain. Although mild muscle soreness is normal, sharp pain and sore or swollen joints are signs that you've overdone it and that your program/activity needs to be modified.

Strength training is a crucial component of physical fitness. Strength training exercise has the ability to enhance personal health, improve physical fitness, and decrease the risk of degenerative diseases. It is never too late to get involved in a strength training program. Remember, if you don't use it, you lose it!

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