Looking for the fountain of youth? As far as I know, no one has found one yet, but strength training is the closest thing we’ve got. Strength training postpones the undesirable aspects of aging and prolongs the look and feel of youth.

by Kathy Smith
Is there a trick to reversing this decline? Strength training. By maintaining muscle mass through strength training, you can slow down the body’s natural aging process and prolong the vitality—and the appearance!—of a youthful body.

**WHO NEEDS TO BUILD MUSCLE?**

Building muscle mass isn’t just for gym rats and body builders. Everyone—let me repeat that—EVERYONE needs to incorporate strength training into his or her life several times a week. If you’re thinking, “I’m a woman so this doesn’t apply to me” or “I’m already in my 70s, it’s too late” then you need to think again. No matter your current age or fitness level, you can reap a wealth of benefits from strength training.

As muscle mass declines, we lose the strength that comes from muscle. That leaves us weak and susceptible to injury. That’s why so many people in their golden years suffer back, hip, and other joint problems. Maintaining muscle mass is critical to preserving your quality of life as you age. Muscle keeps you flexible, gives you better balance, and protects your body from injuries. Weight gain is also a concern. One pound of muscle burns three times as many calories as one pound of fat, so your metabolism takes a nosedive as muscle mass declines. Without the metabolic boost from lean muscle, it’s difficult to burn the unwanted fat with cardio exercise alone. Muscle mass is also essential for reducing diseases as we age. Those with less muscle mass have a considerably higher risk for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, depression, and arthritis.
Now you know how important it is for everyone to build muscle through strength training, but there are a few persistent myths that hold some people back.

**MYTH**
I can only work one muscle at a time so it will take a long time to reach my goal.

**FACT**
Compound movements like squats use multiple muscle groups and can give you a total body workout in a short period of time.

**MYTH**
Building muscle makes women bulky.

**FACT**
Women’s natural testosterone levels prevent them from developing muscles at the rate men do. Unless women purposefully try to build bulk, they will not get bulky. They’ll get toned, lean definition—and who wouldn’t want that?

**MYTH**
I have to have a gym membership to have access to weights.

**FACT**
Resistance builds muscles. Many people use weights at the gym to obtain resistance, but there are plenty of ways to build muscle at home. Do exercises that use your own body weight like push-ups and sit-ups, use resistance bands, or make your own “weights” using sandbags or milk jugs filled with water.

**MYTH**
I will hurt myself.

**FACT**
Injuries come from poor form whether you’re running, doing yoga, or lifting weights. As with any new exercise you are unfamiliar with, consult a trainer on proper form and it’s unlikely you’ll hurt yourself.
How long can you maintain an easy jog before you are out of breath?

Between 5 and 20 minutes

More than 20 minutes

What’s your experience with strength training?

I have never lifted weights

I’ve lifted weights before, but it’s been a long time

I currently lift weights and I am familiar with proper form

How often do you currently exercise?

I don’t exercise at all

1–3 times a week

4 or more times a week

Include any type of exercise like cardio, stretching, etc.

Bend over and try to touch your toes. How far can you stretch?

I can touch my shins

I can touch my ankles

I can touch my toes

Tally your answers.

Mostly As = BEGINNER
Mostly Bs = ACTIVE
Mostly Cs = ENTHUSIAST

If you’re a beginner, educate yourself on proper form and function to reduce the risk of injury. Consult a professional, watch videos, and read fitness magazines and get started! No matter your fitness level, remember to keep your workout fresh by incorporating different types of strength training. You’ll stave off boredom and avoid plateaus in muscle gain.
One pound of muscle burns three times as many calories as one pound of fat, so your metabolism takes a nosedive as muscle mass declines.

**FOUR WAYS TO BUILD MUSCLE**

**YOUR OWN BODY WEIGHT**
Push-ups, plank, squats, lunges, sit-ups, yoga. Using your own body weight for resistance is a classic way to build muscle. Most exercises in this category use multiple muscle groups for a more complete workout. Plus, these exercises can be done anywhere. As you grow stronger and lose weight, these exercises will become easier so you'll need to increase repetitions to keep them effective.

**RESISTANCE BANDS**
Leg lifts, arm raises, pelvic push. Resistance bands allow you to build muscle with a full range of motion, not just up and down, and you can use them for building flexibility. You don’t strengthen a muscle, you strengthen a movement. Plus, bands are small and portable. It will take a little time to learn various ways to use the band. Be prepared to upgrade to bands that offer greater resistance as you grow stronger.

**FREE WEIGHTS**
Bicep curls, chest press, weighted squats. Free weights have more variety in weight increments so you can progress faster. You can also target a specific area you want to focus on. Free weights include dumbbells, barbells, kettle bells, and homemade weights like milk jugs filled with water or sand bags. While free weights offer the quickest avenue for results, they also have the greatest risk for injury, so be sure to use proper techniques.

**MACHINES**
Chest press, leg press, hamstring curls. Machines give you support while you lift weights—something very beneficial to anyone with an injury or a beginner who is still mastering correct form. Machines are simple to use; they are less confusing than a rack of dumbbells or a resistance band. They target fewer muscles at a time and movements are limited. They are large and expensive. Most people use them at a gym.
When

So the message is pretty clear: Regardless of your age or shape, the time to start strength training is NOW. You need strength in so many areas of your life beyond the confines of formal exercise—hoisting kids, lifting groceries, putting bags in the overhead compartment on a plane. Strength training gives you the energy and, well, the strength to enjoy life and all the gifts it has to offer. There are dozens of reasons to maintain muscle mass, but there’s only one that really matters—the quality of your future life depends on what you do now. You’re worth the time and effort. So no more excuses. Start today.

Why

WITH STRENGTH TRAINING, YOU’LL ENJOY:

- A faster metabolism
- A better immune system
- Better posture
- Improved flexibility
- Better balance
- Less arthritis pain
- Increased bone density
- Lower risk of diabetes
- Improved mental outlook
- Better sleep quality
- Better blood sugar control
- Lower risk of heart disease
- Joints that are better protected from injuries
- A toned, sexy physique

TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

- Strength train twice a week, but be sure to take at least a day off between sessions.
- Warm up with a few minutes of cardio first.
- Push yourself—you won’t gain any muscle if you quit when it gets hard.
- Feeling discomfort in muscles is okay. Discomfort in joints is not.
- If you have injuries, pain, or physical limitations, hire a professional to teach you proper techniques before embarking on strength training on your own.
- Perform one set of 10 reps of an exercise using light weight.
- After two weeks, increase your weight and the amount of reps.
- Maintain good posture.
- Lift and lower weights slowly.
- Stretch after every workout to reduce soreness and increase flexibility.
- Eat lean protein within an hour after every workout, like a chicken salad or a ProFlex® protein shake.

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