F.I.T. WITH LYNNE

Q&A: Spotlight on Strength Training



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What is strength training and why is it important especially as we age?

Strength (resistance) training is one component of overall fitness that involves performing exercises to increase your muscle strength by making your muscles work against a weight or a force such as body weight, resistance bands, free weights or weight machines.

Beginning as young as 30, your body naturally starts to lose muscle mass. Decreased muscle mass slows metabolism, leading to an increase in fat gain. Conditions connected to muscle loss and fat gain include obesity, osteoporosis, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, arthritis, low back pain and many types of cancer. Without intervention, this muscle loss and fat gain can lead to sarcopenia – a significant loss of muscle mass and strength impacting your daily functioning including greater risk of falls, difficulty with activities of daily living and a loss of independence.

While this all sounds very depressing, there is great news! Muscle loss can be avoided or reversed by adding in a regular routine of strength training. Research shows that strength training is highly effective for increasing muscle mass at all ages!

> In a study involving nursing home residents (average age of 88), a simple strength training program done for 14 weeks showed remarkable results. The program included 8–12 repetitions of 6 different exercises, 2 days a week. On average the participants added 4 pounds of muscle and lost 3 pounds of fat and increased lower body strength by 80% and upper body strength by 40%. Their quality of life and daily functioning was significantly improved. (Westcott 2009)

The benefits of strength training are numerous including: reduced risk of falls; increased bone density; fat loss and weight management; reduced risk of various other chronic conditions including diabetes, high blood pressure, arthritis, osteoporosis and certain cancers; improved mood and overall increase in your quality of life!

Although I am retired, life feels busier than ever. How much time will I need to commit to strength training to see the benefits?

As noted in the study of nursing home patients, it doesn't take hours of strength training each week to see significant benefit. All it takes is 2–3 strength training sessions a week (on non-consecutive days) committing 20–30 minutes per session.

I have never done any formal strength training before, where do I start?

If you are over 40 and have never done any formal exercise, consult with your physician before you begin.

To get started, all you need is your own body! Your body can act as an effective source of resistance. With time, adding resistance bands and/or free weights can be great ways to progress your exercise to continue to build strength.

Your workout should include exercises that target all of your major muscles and be performed at an intensity that fatigues the muscles. Finding a level of resistance that accomplishes this with 8–12 repetitions is a great starting point.

Along with strength training, it is important to maintain a healthy diet including adequate protein.

If you need help getting started with a strength training program, feel free to contact me. I provide one-on-one exercise training in the comfort of your own home!

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