

I'm So Confused...What did you say to do?

By Kim Siegel, Personal Trainer

Light weights, high reps? Heavy weights, low reps? Circuit training with cardio and weight training combined? You hear so many different instructions, which is better? Why strength train at all?

Weight bearing exercises and flexibility exercises become more important as we age. Why? Because our daily activities tend to involve less and less movement, both in our careers as well as our home life. If you don't use your muscles, you lose your muscles. You can lose up to a pound and a half a year. You are unable to maintain a healthy metabolism without muscle mass leading to swings in weight - gains and losses. If your body loses its flexibility you lose your range of motion (ROM in the world of training). If you lose your ROM, even the simplest acts become challenges. Such activities as getting up from a chair, climbing into a car, reaching up to that top shelf...I could go on and on...become everyday challenges.

You say you don't want to "bulk up" so you don't want to lift heavy weights. Unless you (average female over 30) are taking muscle-enhancing drugs, which I do not recommend, or are specifically training for an event, you **WILL NOT** get "muscle bound". By the same token you must tear (microscopic) the muscle fibers in order to grow larger muscles. So while lifting lighter weights and higher reps are good for the first month or so of introductory weight training, you will not achieve the gains you are looking for unless you increase the weight (maximum weight) with fewer repetitions.

The new craze in circuit training, the "30 minute" workout, has its place also, as well as the "boot camp" style. It is a great place to start by helping to create the habit of working out. It can help build up your cardiovascular health, as well as build up your confidence level. The problem with circuit training is that it uses machines, not free weights for the weight-training portion of the workout. These machines target specific muscles and those muscles only. They don't train your body functionally, meaning training your body in a similar way in which your body moves in real life. When was the last time you actually sat down to row a boat, or sat in a chair and had to extend your legs with weight on them? When you train with free weights in **proper form** you will train not only your core, but all of your stabilizer muscles as well. This will create balance, stability, and flexibility in your daily life.

The most important thing to remember is that you must maintain correct form when you are weight training. Incorrect form not only can promote injuries but also prevents you from working the muscles you were aiming to work. While light weights with high repetitions, circuit training and boot camp are a fine start for beginners; I would not recommend continuing with them over a long period of time if your goal is to build muscle. It is always good to get an assessment from a professional in order to determine your weak areas and to obtain instruction on proper form in order to prevent injury and to maximize your workouts. Get moving, be safe, and HAVE FUN!

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