

Why Strength Training?

By Kim Siegel, Certified Personal Trainer

Many women frequently ask me why they need to include strength training as a part of their fitness program in order to lose weight, or to achieve a higher level of health and fitness. After all, they can burn a lot more calories during an hour of cardio verses an hour of strength training.

This question has several answers. Women begin to lose up to a pound - and -a- half of muscle per year after the age of 21 if you don't use your muscles. The old saying, "- if you don't use it you'll lose it' " is true in this case. As we progress through life our jobs usually require less and less physical activity, so it becomes harder to continually put all of your muscles into play. As you age and your hormone levels change, it becomes harder for your body to produce muscle tissue, so you have to work harder than you did when you were 20 years old in order to achieve the same results. Building up your muscles now will enable you to physically do the things you enjoy when you are 80 years old, thus improving your quality of life. Remember that muscle tissue is the support system for your skeleton. Lack of muscle leads to postural deficiencies including "humpback syndrome."

As your muscle mass declines, so does your metabolism. Muscle tissue requires more calories to maintain. Therefore the more you have, the more calories you will burn just sitting in a chair.

It is true that you can lose weight by just eating correctly and doing cardio, but just as in all forms of exercise, your body adapts and you will have to continually increase the intensity and length of your workouts in order to continue to lose weight. This is one of the causes for the plateaus in the progress of weight loss. By including strength training as a part of your routine, you will build up your muscle mass, and metabolism and continue to lose weight as well as prevent those five to 10 pound swings in your scales without having to increase your cardio workout time.

Strength training, or resistance training as it is called can take many forms. You can use weights, elastic bands, Pilates, Yoga, or better yet, combinations of several in order to provide a well - rounded and toned body. Flexibility exercises and stretches should be included with any good strength

training program in order to keep your muscles long, lean, and your body in balance.

It is important that you begin your strength program with a qualified teacher in order to prevent injuries due to improper form, or by lifting too much weight. You can also lift too little weight, thus not maximizing your time during your workout. And we all know that none of us has time to waste.

As in all exercise, choose what is right for you, both physically and mentally. Even though it is hard work, you can make it fun by including your friends and family in the different activities.

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