

Exercise: Strength Training



Strength (resistance) training uses weights or stretch bands to help improve your strength and muscle endurance. It also includes exercises such as push-ups, which use your own body weight as resistance.

Strength training can improve your overall health and your ability to do daily activities. It is often combined with aerobic exercise, such as walking or running, which helps you control your weight, improve your heart health, and lower your risk for health problems.

You will get the most benefit from strength exercises when you do them at least 2 days a week and work all your major muscle groups. These include the muscles of your arms, your back, your hips, and your legs.

Strength training that uses weight to provide resistance can be done at a health club, at home, or in a weight room. You may use free weights (barbells and dumbbells), resistance training machines, or your own body weight. Stretch bands are low-cost and easy to use at home.

How can you get started?

If you want to begin strength training:

- **Start with professional instruction** from a local YMCA, a fitness club, or an experienced professional trainer. If you ask for help from a friend, find out if that person has professional training.
- **Get individual help.** Tell your trainer or instructor what you want to focus on. For example, you may work on toning and shaping certain areas.
- **Find books, brochures, or DVDs.** These may help you learn to do strength training the right way so you don't hurt yourself. Learn more about fitness at www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity.

Talk to your doctor

Moderate activity is safe for most people, but it's always a good idea to talk to your doctor before getting more active. If you're at risk for or have heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, or other health problems, your doctor can help you find ways to exercise safely.

How can you make your workouts safe and effective?

For a safe and effective workout, it's important to start slowly and use the right technique.

- **Learn the proper form for each exercise,** and always use it. This helps you get the most out of each exercise, and it helps prevent injuries. If you work with a trainer, ask about proper form. Or find other resources, such as books or DVDs.

- **Allow at least 2 weeks** for your muscles and other tissues to adjust to the new stress of weight training. Start by lifting weights that are light enough for you to manage easily.
- **Slowly move your muscles through their full range of motion.** Fewer repetitions that are done slowly, using the entire length of the muscle, are more effective than many repetitions that are done quickly with a shorter movement of the muscle.
 - In general, do 1 or 2 sets of 8 to 12 repetitions.
 - Older adults and people who are frail can do 10 to 15 repetitions with less weight.
- **Learn how to breathe properly** when using weights. Exhale when pushing against the weight. Inhale when there is little or no resistance. Don't hold your breath at any point.

Changing your routine

Variety keeps your interest up and helps you prevent injuries. Mix strength training with stretching and aerobic workouts. Try alternating between:

- Your upper body and lower body.
- Free weights and machines or stretch bands and body-weight exercises.
- Heavier weights with fewer repetitions and lighter weights with more repetitions.

When you feel ready, ask a trainer or find other resources that teach you:

- How to improve.
- How often to increase sets and repetitions.

- When to increase weight.
 - Start with a weight you can lift 8 to 12 times but that gets hard to lift by the last repetition.
 - When it gets easier, add a little weight and go down to 8 repetitions, and then gradually build up to 12 repetitions again.

Safety tips for getting active

Always be safe when doing any new activity.

- Learn about the risks of any new activity. Take lessons if needed.
- Wear clothing that is right for your activity and shoes that have good support for your feet.
- Always use proper safety gear.
- Start your activity routine slowly and work up to your normal level.
- Don't overdo it. Some minor soreness or stiffness is normal at first, but pain is a warning sign to stop.

Questions to ask your doctor

Use the space below to list your questions or concerns. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

Questions about strength training: