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Photo by Jordan ShakeshaftWe're probably not surprising anyone when we tell you strength training helps build muscles. But that isn't the only benefit. Here are some seriously surprising pros of hitting up the weight rack:Protecting against injury. Lifting doesn't just strengthen muscles. Ligaments and tendons also get stronger, potentially protecting against tears and other aches and pains.Wise up. Studies show strength training can strengthen the brain, too. Smart move, right?Make like milk. Calcium's not the only way to get strong bones — lifting weights may accomplish the same goal.Improve office life. Studies suggest working out with weights could make us happier at work and boost productivity.Read on for 15 more reasons to work those muscles...The Takeaway: Weight training is good for the body and mind. Check out our list of 20 reasons to quit making excuses.Work Like an AthleteGuest contributor Collin Orcutt reflects of life after sports. Leaving the court doesn't have to mean giving up on fitness.Fun Fact:Spalding became the official basketball maker back in 1894 — just three years after the game was invented — and it's still the official ball of the NBA. By Hayley, Facky StaffUpdated: Dec 18, 2018I mention strength training to the typical man or woman in the street, they will probably assume you are speaking about weight lifting. Even though weights belong in a typical strength-training program, the techniques applied differ from those used in this competitive sport. Strength training is all about strengthening your muscles by compelling them to resist the forces of gravity; this is why some people prefer to call it resistance training. If the program succeeds, you emerge with larger and stronger muscles. The training may focus on increasing your strength or improving muscle hardness. Each of these objectives requires a slightly different approach to the use of weights. Even though strength training can contribute so much to improving fitness some people must check with a health professional if it is safe for them to do. For examples, if someone has had a joint replaced or repaired they need to ask their doctor if they can exercise in this way. If you have any doubts about your medical state, always get the situation clarified before starting strength training. Although you can find great strength training materials in the library and online, there is no substitute for the services of a qualified trainer. If your budget does not stretch to a private trainer, see if you can find a local group to join. Reading materials give a good general overview of the principles, but if you try to make a program for yourself unaided, you are unlikely to know how to adjust it to your specific goals. Someone who is not familiar with how to lift weights properly can easily give himself or herself a painful injury if they proceed without any supervision. Some people have this tendency where they want to jump in at the deep end, but this approach is not the recommended one in this case. Although you can achieve much more when you work with the heaviest weights, it is best to start with lighter dumbbells. It is much easier to learn the techniques with these lighter weights. By the time you are ready to proceed with heavier weights, you will know how to handle them to achieve the maximum results while avoiding injuries. Progressing gradually is a key strength training principle. Even when you feel confident that you lift a certain weight safely, do not be tempted to skip intermediate weight levels and aim to lift a much higher weight. Always pay attention to your form as you lift the weights. You need to maintain this form when you move on to heavier lifts. It is important to challenge yourself but if you take on an unrealistic challenge and end up sacrificing form you lose, and also risk injury. Contrary to what you might expect, it is not a good idea to do weight lifting while wearing trainers – even the most expensive and high-quality varieties. The experts recommend that you weight lift while barefoot. No doubt many will find this strange advice, but it has a firm scientific basis. First, you find that when you stand barefoot, it gives you more lifting power and stability so you can lift heavier weights that you can lift while wearing footwear. Also, it also ensures that the feet benefit fully from the strength training as well as the muscles in your arms. Although you can just get out of the car, go to the gym, change your clothes, and start lifting those weights, it is not advisable to behave in this way. For the best strength training experience, you should spend ten minutes on preparations. Some people want around the block, do stretch outs or other exercise designed to make the body less stiff. Since stiffness is one of the most common causes of strength training injuries, you certainly should not neglect these preparations – even if you happen to be very pressed for time that day. Just as you should not fail to spend ten minutes on preparation for your strength training session, remember to set aside time to unwind after the session. Some recommend that you spend about ten minutes stretching out. Also, make sure to have a break in between sessions to give your muscles time to recover. Do not do strength training on successive days but allow at least a 24-hour break before going back to the gym. Normal healthy people don't usually give much attention to how they breathe. It is such a regular bodily function that it only attracts attention if something goes wrong. If you start to do strength training, paying attention to how you are breathing becomes significant. A good breathing technique helps to avoid injury and improves the effectiveness of this training. Try to breathe out when you are working away hard lifting up the weight and breath out when you relieve yourself of this pressure. To achieve the maximum benefits from strength training, you ought to set a schedule. The experts suggest you should aim to focus on strengthening each key muscles group in two or three sessions each week. During the sessions try to repeat each exercise at least ten times in succession and then take a break for a minute before you repeat this exercise. Since you need to give muscles at least a day's break after each workout, three is the maximum number of workouts you can cram into a week. A well-disciplined individual who has learned the techniques well can certainly do their strength training alone, but most people find it more motivating and enjoyable to do these exercises in company. Even if you do not have any friends who want to come along, you can easily make new friends in a strength-training group. To get the most out of the experience take advantage of the social opportunities while improving your fitness. If you've been thinking about incorporating strength training and weightlifting into your workout routine, understanding potential benefits can help you set your goals. As part of a comprehensive fitness routine, strength training can help in toning muscles, increasing metabolism, and building lean muscle. Whether you're utilizing a full-circuit gym or working with a set of at-home equipment, strength training can have notable benefits on your health. Here are six ways strength training can be a positive addition into your workout routine. If you want to reduce body fat, you may have to create a calorie deficit (through exercise and diet) and see how your body responds. What you're likely to find is that wherever you tend to store excess fat is the last place you'll lose it. For women, that's often the hips, thighs, and lower belly. For men, it's often the belly and waist. Instead of wasting money on false promises and silly gadgets that promise targeted fat loss, try a healthier approach so that you can get your strongest body rather than an idealized body that always seems out of reach: A study done in the 1980s at the University of Massachusetts had 13 males do vigorous ab exercises for 27 days, and fat biopsies were taken both before and after the exercise. The results? Subjects decreased fat from different areas of the body, not just the abs. You can customize and change the weights you use in every strength training session. The truth is that despite common beliefs, strength training with lighter weights and higher reps doesn't burn more fat. The only way it will tone your body is if you've created a calorie deficit that allows you to lose body fat. Using lighter weights for higher reps will help you increase muscular endurance. It does have a place in training routines, but that lean, defined look comes from losing body fat. So, does that mean you shouldn't use the lightweight, high-rep approach with strength training? Not necessarily. How you lift weights depends on your goals and fitness level. But for weight loss, it's great to use a variety of rep and weight ranges. For strength gains: 1 to 6 reps with heavy weightsFor gaining muscle and size: 8 to 12 reps with medium-heavy weightsFor endurance: 12 to 16 reps (or more) with light-medium weights No matter what range you choose, you should always lift enough weight that you can only complete the desired reps. If you're doing 12 bicep curls, choose a weight that allows you to 12 reps with good form. If you can do more than that, increase your weight. Using all three ranges, whether you use them each week, each month or change them every few weeks, is a great way to challenge your body in different ways. While cardio is important for general health and weight management, it isn't the only type of exercise that can help you reduce body fat. Strength training helps you preserve the muscle you have as well as increase your muscle mass. The more muscle you have, the more calories you'll burn all day long. Remember, muscle is more active than fat. In fact, a pound of muscle can burn anywhere from 10 to 20 calories a day, while a pound of fat burns only 2 to 5 calories a day. And muscle is more dense than fat and takes up less space. That means when you lose fat and gain muscle, you may weigh more but your physique could be more defined. Plenty of people, especially women, avoid strength training, either because they think they'll gain weight or because they like cardio better. Builds lean muscle tissue. Strengthens muscles, bones and connective tissue. Keeps your body strong and injury-free for your cardio workouts. Raises metabolism. An effective fat loss program will include regular strength training and cardio workouts, done either separately or together, depending on your schedule and goals. Another important component is, of course, eating a balanced, nutritious diet. By implementing all three components, you can maximize health. How do you know if you've gotten a good strength training workout? A lot of people would measure their workouts by how sore they are the next day, but that isn't the best way to gauge your workout. Soreness is normal if you're a beginner, if you've changed your usual routine or if you're trying new activities. But that soreness should lessen over time. If you're sore after every workout, you may need to add more recovery days or reduce the intensity of your workouts to allow your body time to adapt and grow stronger. Soreness is actually caused by small tears in your muscle fibers, which is how muscles respond when overloaded. Rest and recovery are essential for growing stronger and building lean muscle tissue. If you're sore after every workout, you may need more time to recover or you risk overtraining and injury. Lift enough weight. When strength training, you always want to choose a weight heavy enough that you can only complete the desired number of reps. If you stop at the end of a set and realize you could do more, increase your weight so that the last rep is difficult, but not impossible, to complete. Work out all your muscle groups. Whether you do a total body workout or a split routine, make sure you hit all your muscle groups two to three times each week, with at least one exercise per muscle group (more if you're more advanced). Keep challenging yourself. Since your muscles adapt to regular exercises, increase the load, intensity, and duration of your workouts over time. To help mitigate soreness, you should warm up before your workout and cool down and stretch the muscles you've used after the workout. Women typically don't have the amount of testosterone necessary to build huge muscles. In fact, even men can struggle to gain muscle. Lifting heavy weights can benefit both men and women. In fact, challenging your body with heavy weights is the only way you'll really see results and get stronger. Remember, muscle takes up less space than fat. When you add muscle, that helps you lose fat (along with your cardio and healthy diet, of course), which means you'll be leaner and more defined. If you're still reluctant to lift weights because you've never tried and you have no idea where to start, try the Total Body Strength for Beginners workout, which starts you out with the basics of a solid strength program. Of course, if you have medical issues or conditions, check with your doctor to get clearance. Beyond that, there's no age limit on beginning a strength program and, even better, the improvements you see will make your life better. Benefits can include: Better functioning Building strong, lean muscle Greater strength and flexibility Improved balance and coordination More confidence Reduced risk of falling Weight management In fact, the risks associated with not exercising and lifting weights are much greater than a safe, effective strength program. Without exercise, we could lose 3% to 5% of our muscle mass per decade after age 40, which experts call sarcopenia. This loss of muscle doesn't just cause weight gain, but it also contributes to reduced functionality and strength. You don't have to spend hours lifting heavy weights to get the benefits, either. Strength training can be an effective way to target multiple muscle groups and develop strength. Mixing up your routine and adding in new varieties of workouts and weights can help you further build lean muscle mass. To begin a new strength training routine, consider working with a personal trainer who will tailor a workout just for you.



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