Do You Lift Weights Regularly?

By Marcie Malone

Your major weight-bearing muscle fibers begin to break down and weaken around age 40, and by the time you are 60, you will have lost at least 15% of the lean body mass you had as a young adult. The clinical term for this age-induced muscle wasting is known as “sarcopenia.”

There are really only two reasons why older people end up in a nursing home. One is that their brains stop working, and the other is that their muscles stop working. Especially their leg muscles.

Jeff Williamson, MD – Geriatrician

The effects of sarcopenia cannot be reversed; however, through strength training the muscle fibers that remain can be made more effective. In that way, age-associated atrophy, weakness, and fatigue can be slowed.

Prevention is the better plan; you should build up your muscle reserve before it starts breaking down. This will help avoid the drastic functional decline seen in smaller-framed individuals in whom a 15% drop in muscle tone leaves them weak and unable to live independently.

Obviously, a physically active person develops more muscle tone than an inactive person, but did you know that a sedentary individual actually loses muscle tone. This is because of the “use it or lose it “ phenomenon. Studies have shown that extended periods of inactivity cause fast twitch muscle fibers to die (i.e. the muscles that help facilitate rapid and forceful movement). Once dead, they cannot be regenerated.

Therefore, strength training is important for people of all ages. Yet, most adults, even highly active ones, tend to skip strength training and miss out on the following benefits:

- Changes in Body Composition – increased lean body mass and decreased body fat percentage
- Muscle Strength
- Improved Balance
- Weight Control – increased resting metabolic rate (for a few hours after lifting, you burn more calories than normal)
- Joint Flexibility – enhanced range of motion

Also, below are some of the other health benefits of strength training:

- Reduced blood pressure
- Better gastrointestinal transit speed
- Improved postcoronary performance
- Improved lipid profiles
- Enhanced glucose control

- Eased arthritic comfort
- Relieved depression
- Increased bone density
- Alleviated low back pain

Muscles are major reservoirs for the body's supply of fuel in the form of amino acids. More muscles mean more fuel. When recovering from an illness, a person relies on amino acids. If they don't have much muscles tissue, then they will not have much of an amino acid reservoir.

FREEDOM THROUGH FUNCTIONALITY

In the elderly, even the smallest gains in muscle strength can make a big difference in functional capacity. It can affect whether an older person can get out a chair without help. It can also influence their sense of balance, risk of falls and fractures, and ability to climb stairs or carry groceries. It can even enhance an elderly individual's range of motion for putting on and taking off shoes and clothing.

Workout Tips from the National Institute on Aging:

1. In addition to 30 minutes/day of moderately intense aerobic activity five days each week, strength exercises for all major muscle groups should be performed at least twice weekly. Don't do strength exercises for the same muscle group on any two days in a row.

2. Use a minimum amount of weight the first week, and then add weight gradually. If you are out of shape, start with as little as one or two pounds, or no weight at all. The tissues that bind the structures of the body together need time to adapt to strength exercises. Beginning with weights that are too heavy can cause injury.

Gradually add a challenging amount of weight in order to continue the benefits from strength exercises. If muscles are not challenged, no benefit

Did you know that 65% of women aged 75 and older cannot lift 10 pounds?

How do they lift a grandchild or respond to an emergency situation?

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