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Building a Better Body

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Strength training helps
you stay young.

Building a Better Body

Muscle loss can
be reversed.

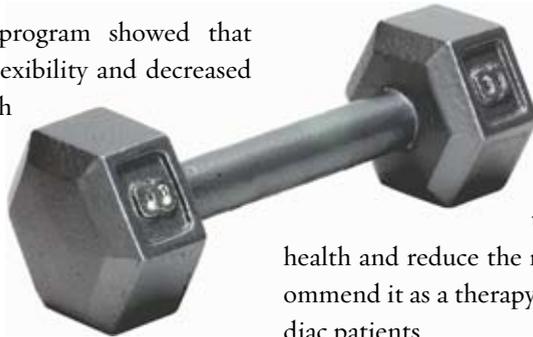
BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Strength training is safe and effective for men and women of all ages. Coupled with aerobic exercise, strength training has a significant impact upon one's physical and mental health. Strength training improves one's self-confidence and self-esteem, and acts as an antidepressant. One feels fitter and is less prone to injuries. The symptoms of chronic conditions such as back pain, arthritis and depression are diminished, while there is a reduced risk of chronic diseases, such as diabetes and osteoporosis.

Results from a four-month program showed that strength training improved joint flexibility and decreased pain in older men and women with moderately severe osteoarthritis by about 40 percent, similar to that seen with medications. Similar improvements in clinical symptoms have also been observed in patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

In a research study, strength training twice a week by postmenopausal women improved hip and spinal bone mineral density by about one percent with a subsequent reduction in the risk of bone fractures. Stronger muscles make for stronger bones. In addition, significant improvement in balance occurs with progressive strength training. Stronger muscles mean fewer falls, and fewer disabling fractures.

Muscle mass naturally decreases as you age. Typically, in a sedentary person muscle loss is replaced with fat. The increase in body fat puts one at greater risk of heart disease and cancer. However, strength training can reverse the trend of muscle loss and fat gain. Strength training builds muscle mass, which increases the metabolic rate and improves weight management and glucose control. Muscle loss means that more fat is deposited in muscle cells. This marbling effect is associated with insulin resistance, which means an increased risk of diabetes mellitus.



Cardiac patients can also improve their aerobic capacity when they engage in strength training. The American Heart Association has recommended strength training as a way to improve cardiac health and reduce the risk of heart disease. They also recommend it as a therapy in the rehabilitation regime of cardiac patients.

The purpose of strength training is to strengthen the large muscles of the back, abdomen and shoulders, as well as the arms and thighs. To effectively build muscle, one should follow a routine that involves a series of exercises, performed three times a week, in which each exercise is slowly repeated ten to 12 times, using appropriate weights.

Eating adequate protein is important for muscle health. However, muscle building does not come from a bottle. Products like DHA (docosahexaenoic acid) and creatine are just not worth the money, while human growth hormone has undesirable side effects. The surest and safest way to prevent muscle loss and build muscle is through regular strength training. The good news is that with two months of strength training a person can reverse two decades of sarcopenia (muscle loss).

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