

Strength Training for Older Adults

(adapted from CDC's "Growing Stronger – Strength Training for Older Adults")

Research has shown that strengthening exercises are both safe and effective for women and men of all ages, including those who are not in perfect health. In fact, people with health concerns often benefit the most from an exercise program that includes strength training a few times each week.

Benefits of Strength Training

There are numerous benefits to strength training, particularly as you grow older. Strengthening exercises increase the strength of your muscles, maintain the integrity of your bones, and improve your balance, coordination, and mobility. In addition, strength training can help reduce the signs and symptoms of many chronic diseases. Strength training, particularly in conjunction with regular aerobic exercise, can also have a profound impact on a person's mental and emotional health.



How do I Get Started?

#1 – Define Your Goals

When taking on any challenge, it's a good idea to define your goals. Identify what you want to accomplish and how you will carry out your plan. This is important when making positive change and will help you succeed.

Before starting this program, set short-term and long-term goals. These goals should be **S-M-A-R-T**: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Based. Write them down in a journal or in your exercise log. Listing these goals will help you stay with the program, see your progress, and enjoy your success.

For example:

A **specific** short-term goal may be to start strength training. This goal is easily **measurable**: Have you or have you not begun the program? Indeed, this is an **attainable** goal, as long as your doctor approves, and this goal is certainly **relevant** to living a long, healthy life. Your goal should be **time-based**: you should buy the equipment you need and set your exercise schedule within the next 5 days. Start the program within the following 2 to 3 days.

The goals and time frame are entirely up to you. You may want to focus your long-term goals on improving a specific health condition; or your goal may be to bowl or play tennis, or perhaps to do all of your own chores. Your success depends on setting goals that are truly important to you—and possessing a strong desire to achieve them.

#2 – Select a Program That Is Right for You

The following links will take you to strength training programs designed specifically for older adults:

- http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/growing_stronger/index.htm
- <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/exercise/strengthexercises/01.html>

Both sites have demonstration videos, and printer-friendly versions that you can download and print for easy reference.

#3 – Get Prepared

Find a strong, stable chair without arms that does not rock or sway when you sit in it or move when you stand up from it. When you're seated in the chair, your knees should be at a 90-degree angle and your feet should be flat on the ground. Choose an open area, preferably carpeted, with at least enough space for your chair and ample room to walk around it.

You can perform many basic strengthening exercises without weights, but as you get stronger and add new exercises, you will need dumbbells and ankle weights. It's a good idea to buy these before you begin strength training, or as soon as possible after you start, so that you'll have them on hand when you're ready to add them to your program.

#4 – Schedule Your Exercise

Look at your schedule to see where strength training may best fit. Schedule your sessions on two or three non-consecutive days to give your muscles proper rest. Write your first exercise appointments on your calendar. After completing your first few sessions, evaluate whether your selected days and times work well for you. If they don't, reexamine your schedule and find better times.

#5 – Do It!

It is important to find the right balance between exercising conservatively to prevent injury and consistently progressing to increase strength. For each exercise, you should be able to complete two sets of repetitions with good form using only your body weight. When that becomes easy, gradually increase the intensity, adding weight by using hand or ankle weights.

Keep a record of your exercise – not only will it help you monitor your progress, but you will also see yourself getting stronger! And don't forget to celebrate when you achieve the goals you've set for yourself – you deserve it!