

MUSCLE UP

Strength training important for bones, balance and burning calories

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First off, let's dispel that silly notion that muscle weighs more than fat and that strength training in an exercise and weight loss program is counterproductive for that reason. A pound of muscle weighs the same as a pound of fat. They each weigh a pound.

The difference, according to Bobbi Dunn, a fitness specialist at the Center for Health Enhancement at St. Luke's Hospital, is muscle takes up less space than fat.

"So when you use weights to build and strengthen your muscles, you may not notice immediate weight loss," Dunn says. "But you will begin to notice that you lose inches — around your waist, hips, arms, and thighs."

Strength training is an important part of a total exercise program, Dunn says.

"One of the most important reasons for this is that as you increase muscle and lose fat you increase your metabolism — the rate you burn calories," Dunn says. "The more muscle you have, the more efficient and effective your metabolism. That not only helps you lose weight, it helps you keep the weight off."

Another primary reason for including strength training in an exercise program, according to Dunn, is that it can play a critical role in preventing osteoporosis. This is especially important for women.

"We have lots of evidence that exercising with weights helps prevent loss of bone density," she says. "For women and older adults, bone density is a significant issue. Brittle bones can lead to serious health and quality-of-life consequences."

Finally, Dunn says, weight training is an effective way to reduce the body's output of cortisol.

"Cortisol is a hormone our bodies produce when we are under stress," she says. "Cortisol increases one's appetite, and it also tends to convert calories into abdominal fat, which is especially dangerous, because abdominal fat — belly fat — is so close to

vital organs and it puts pressure on those organs. But strength training uses up cortisol and helps reduce belly fat and curb your appetite.

“Strength training with weights should be a part of any balanced exercise program. The bottom line is that it’s healthy to be strong.”

Strengthening the argument

Bobbi Dunn has a bachelor’s degree in kinesiology from Kansas State University. She is a certified aerobics instructor (American Fitness Association of America) and certified in health and fitness by the American College of Sports Medicine. Her recommendations for adding weight training to your workouts:

■ **Consult with a personal trainer** at a gym or health club (there will likely be a fee) before incorporating weights into your workout.

“A good trainer will show you which exercises will help you most, and will provide instruction on how to do them,” Dunn says. “Proper technique is critical. If you’re not using the weights correctly you may get hurt, or you may just be wasting your time.”

■ **Go slow at first.** “Start with two or three sets per week,” she says. “A ‘set’ consists of several repetitions, or ‘reps,’ which is the number of times you lift the weights or complete the movement of the exercise. Try to do one set for each major muscle group.”

■ **Individuals younger than 50 should do 8-12 reps per exercise. Those 50 and older should do 10-15 reps per exercise.** “Older adults should do more reps with smaller weights. This will build strength, increase balance and prevent loss of bone density,” Dunn says. “And those are all important health concerns for older people.”

■ **The initial amount of weight for each exercise (2 pounds, 5 pounds etc.) will vary from person to person.** Dunn offers this rule-of-thumb for determining what weights to use to start exercising: “If you’re doing 10 reps, the last 2 or 3 should be challenging — difficult, but not impossible to finish. If, after 10, you feel like you could do 5 more, you’re not using enough weight. If you can’t complete 10, you’re using too much weight.”