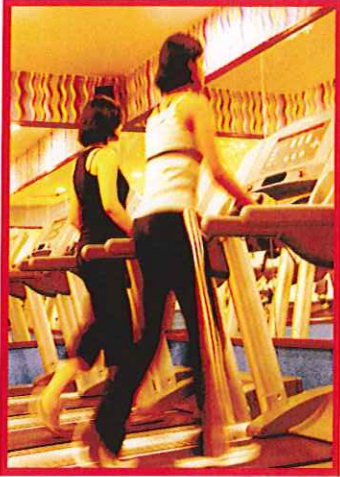


## Why we all need to be in training



A tactical athlete is one whose job demands strength, agility, and endurance—such as a fire fighter or soldier. But daily life can make tactical athletes of us all. A child to be picked up and carried. A garbage can to be moved to the curb. A bag that must be hoisted to the luggage rack. Not to mention all that junk needing to be carried up from the basement. In an age when baggage handlers and household help are a vanishing breed, the tactical athlete in all of us is often on call.

Everybody needs strength and endurance, especially as the years pass. The way to keep your muscles and bones strong is to use them and to work them to their limit occasionally—so that when the time comes to do the extra lifting, you'll be able to. Unused muscles atrophy, leading to falls, weakness, and disability. Strong muscles

can reduce low back pain and arthritis pain. Even very old people can gain muscle strength with training.

### Try this test. True or false?

1. Strength training is for men only.
2. It will make your muscles bulge.
3. To do it, you have to join a gym.

All these statements are false, as you probably knew. Strength training is good for everybody. The benefits for women are notable, since women are more prone to bone loss at earlier ages (building muscles also builds bones). A moderate program for health benefits will not turn your muscles into bulging bands of steel or endow you with washboard abs. And you can do a lot by yourself at home. However, a gym membership and access to good equipment and a trainer are an advantage.

### Some questions and answers about strength training:

#### What are sets and reps?

Repetitions, or reps, are the number of times you lift weights in one go. A set is a group of repetitions. If you lift a weight eight times, that's one set. If you do three sets, that's 24 lifts.

#### How many sets should you do?

The standard number is three sets (of however many reps) with each weight. Trainers may suggest more sets, or fewer sets with heavier weights.

#### Is it okay to weight-train every day?

Muscles generally need to rest for about 48 hours, during which they replenish their energy supply and increase protein synthesis, thus growing in size and strength. This recovery period also helps reduce the risk of injury and excessive soreness. But most people need to train just two or three times a week, in any case. If you want to workout on consecutive days, you can do upper-body training one day and lower-body the next.

#### Should you rest between sets?

Yes. Muscles also need time to recover in the short term in order to make forceful contractions and training adaptations. A one-minute rest is usually enough; 30 seconds between sets is

okay and may help build endurance. Depending on the intensity of the workout, some people recommend a rest of up to three minutes, or even more, but this can be difficult in a busy gym and also adds a lot of time to your workout.

### **How much weight should you lift?**

It depends on your ability and goals: Start with light weights, then move up gradually. Pick weights that allow you to do only eight to twelve repetitions, with the last two being somewhat difficult, so that the muscles are tired at the end of each set. If you can do more than twelve reps, that means the weight is too light and you can increase it. The idea is to stress—but not over stress—muscles. You may not know until the next day that you have done too much. A little soreness may be a good sign, but not so much that you are in pain.

### **Besides free weights, what can you use?**

Anything that provides resistance: weight machines, special elastic bands, or exercises such as push-ups, in which your body serves as the weight.

### **Can you stick with the same plan week after week?**

Not if you want to improve your fitness level and challenge your muscles. That's because your body adapts quickly to a given stress level. **Here are ways to vary your workout:**

- Increase the number of reps, and then the number of sets. Or increase the weight so that you can cut back on the number of reps and/or sets. You can alternate "heavy" days (heavier weights, with fewer reps and/or sets) with lighter ones.
- Use a variety of weights and machines. Do rowing exercises on day 1 and day 3, legs curls on day 2, and so forth. If you are working out at home, vary your free weights and elastic bands, and intersperse this with some push-ups and sit-ups.

### **What's so great about a gym?**

The large choice of machines and free weights make it easier to vary your workout. There will be trainers to get you started safely and to answer questions. You'll have company—which can be a motivating factor—and you'll surely see others in your age group and at your fitness level. Gyms are no longer training grounds for Mr. America aspirants—most gyms welcome older members. Tour a facility before joining. Make sure the trainers and instructors have proper certification.

### **How can you avoid injury?**

- If you have high blood pressure or a history of heart disease, or are recovering from an injury, get medical advice before you start. Make sure the program you undertake is tailored to your needs.
- Avoid locking your knees or elbows, and don't arch your back.
- Work smoothly—always lower weights in a controlled manner. Never bend from the waist to pick up a weight.
- On machines, read and follow the instructions. Adjust the seat properly. If you need help, ask.
- Lifting weights should not be effortless—the idea is to tax your muscles somewhat. But if you feel breathless, exhausted, or overheated, stop. If you feel pain, stop.
- Breathe! Exhale as you lift, inhale as you relax.

**Words to the wise:** Strength training by itself is not enough to stay fit. Make it part of a general program that includes aerobic exercise—walking, cycling, swimming, jogging, and possibly a sport.