

Strength Training

Creating A Firmer, Fitter, Healthier You

By Chris Cosich

Suppose your doctor said he or she had a prescription for you. The prescribed treatment would result in most, if not all, of the following: feeling and looking younger, improved vitality and sleep, elimination of chronic pain and stress, loss of body fat, increased strength, lowered physical-injury risk and alleviation of depression. If used properly, there would be NO harmful side effects. It's prescribed for men and women from 16 to 80. You would jump at this suggestion, wouldn't you? The prescription is commitment to a regular strength-training program.

"Strength training is not bodybuilding."

First, understand that there is a distinction between strength training and weight lifting. The objective of a strength-training program is to improve total fitness. Weight lifting or power lifting are competitive sporting events that test an athlete's maximum strength capability for a single repetition in a particular exercise.

Strength training is not bodybuilding. Competitive bodybuilders are a blend of athlete and artist, who train with weights to develop their physiques to a balance of muscular size, symmetry and aesthetics. Strength training is a "regimen of progressive resistance exercise designed to enhance musculoskeletal strength," according to the American Medical Association (AMA). Translation: You are creating a fitter, firmer you.

Don't jump to the conclusion that exercise involving weights is an undertaking left to the young and cannot be taken on, if you have not been involved in it prior to a certain age. In fact, the AMA and the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC), have concluded that strength training is the exercise protocol of choice because the list of health benefits is the most extensive.

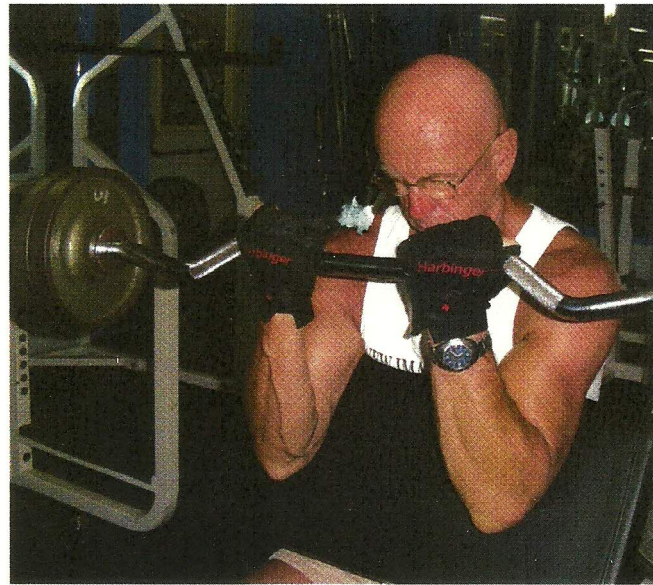
STRENGTH TRAINING VS. RESISTANCE TRAINING

There are various methods and protocols that force muscles to work against resistance. Pilates, certain forms of yoga, and core training, all engage muscles to work against various levels of resistance. These forms most often involve slow or static contraction of the muscle. In terms of actual increases in strength capability, their results are negligible.

The reason? Static, slow or isometric contractions--that these methods employ--do not readily activate adequate fast-twitch muscle fiber. Fast twitch (or white muscle fiber, the most metabolically active) is muscle responsible for powerful, explosive bursts used by sprinters and gymnasts. Flexibility and muscle control are absolutely crucial to structuring a healthy, fit body. They are also an absolute requirement to people, who wish to maintain athletic integrity. Strength training with weights, structured in a progressive resistance schematic, is a direct means to this end. If you are a beginner, it's a good idea to enlist the guidance of a certified trainer to insure correct form and to limit injury risk.

FREE WEIGHTS VS. MACHINES

Weight machines have become big business in the fitness industry. There are as many companies, and types, as there are those who misuse them.



Fact: Weight machines work through a controlled and often linear motion. Their purpose is to isolate a particular muscle group. Balance, stability and control are largely taken out of the equation. Consequently, smaller secondary muscles that surround joints, as well as connective tissue (tendons and ligaments), are not readily strengthened in conjunction with the muscle involved.

Free weights (barbells, dumbbells) may seem antiquated,

