

Jeni's Health & Fitness Tips

Issue 21 October 2006

Hi Everyone!

Many of my classes involve strength training in various forms using hand weights, resistance bands, weight bars and body weight. There are many good reasons why adults should do strength training, particular older adults. One is never too old to do strength training and it can even decrease the aging process. Muscle fibre size and strength decrease with age and by regularly training our muscles they can maintain the size and strength of a more youthful person.

Benefits of Strength training include:

Increased strength: Gains of up to 180% can be achieved making everyday activities easier and maintaining independence.

Increased fat free mass: A stronger muscle will increase in size and contribute towards a higher basal metabolic rate and a lower fat to muscle ratio.

Connective tissue strength increase: Tendons and ligaments also increase in strength giving the joints more support and hence more stability.

Increase in Bone Density: Osteoporosis can be prevented and reversed by strength training. When loaded the bones will increase in density resulting in less risk of fractures.

Improved metabolic profile: Cholesterol levels can be improved, as can markers of insulin resistance (type II diabetes).

Improved self reported quality of life and a decrease in depression: Studies show that regular exercise decreases the likelihood of depression and participants report improved self esteem, mobility, endurance and spontaneous activity levels.

Reasons for not doing Strength Training are often:

"I have a bad back"

A large percentage of back pain is caused by weak stabilizing muscles and lack of flexibility. Training these deep stabilizing muscles will increase back strength and result in less back pain. Before commencing a strength-training program make sure you learn how to use these muscles correctly.

"I'm too old"

One is never too old. Having stronger muscles will help you maintain independence in later life. If your thigh muscles are weak and you have difficulty getting out of a chair or if you can't lift a shopping bag then you will lose your independence.

"I don't have time"

Exercise can be done in short bursts throughout the day if you don't have time for a one-hour session. For example, you could do push ups on the kitchen bench while waiting for the kettle to boil or a back to the wall squat while talking on the phone or even a tricep dip each time you sit on a chair. It all adds up!

Strength training should be done at least twice a week in conjunction with cardio-vascular and endurance work as well as flexibility training. Combining all these aspects of health will keep you looking and feeling younger and more energetic!

Yours in health,

Jeni