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Benefits of Resistance Training No Longer in Question

By Michele Warmerdam

With all the conflicting information out there about diet and exercise, it's no wonder that my clients come to me with so many misconceptions. In my work as a personal trainer, one myth I find myself demystifying over and over again is that resistance training is only beneficial for body builder types. This is very far from the truth as anyone and everyone can benefit from a properly designed resistance training program, no matter what their goal.

So you may be asking, what exactly is resistance training? Resistance training usually involves using weights or some other form of resistance designed to improve an individual's strength. It is also sometimes referred to as "strength" or "weight" training and it can include such things as lifting weights, body weight exercises such as push ups, using weight machines, and certain styles of yoga to name a few examples.

For most of my clients, the primary goal tends to be fat loss, and to achieve that I have found resistance training to be essential. Many people are under the misconception that for fat loss, they just need to do a lot of cardio exercise and cut calories from their diet. While they will in fact probably lose weight, they run the risk of losing some of that valuable muscle.

Resistance training assists the body in burning calories by increasing lean muscle mass and Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR). BMR is the number of calories your body burns at rest to maintain normal body functions. According to the American Council on Exercise (ACE), most adults lose about ½ a pound of muscle per year. As we lose muscle mass, our BMR slows down contributing to that gradual unwanted weight gain since we can no longer consume the same amount of calories we used to. Basically, muscle burns up to 5 times as many calories at rest compared to fat. This means that the more muscle you have, the more calories you will burn, and the more likely you will lose the fat and keep it off.

Many women seem to be worried about taking up resistance training for fear that they will become too muscular and look bulky but this is simply not the case. The hormone testosterone, which is the predominant male sex hormone, is a very important factor in the development of muscle as it

significantly increases it. Research has shown that males have approximately 10 times more of this hormone than females which explains why males generally have more muscle. Not only are females lacking in testosterone, they also produce significant amounts of the female hormone estrogen which has been shown to inhibit the growth of muscle tissue.

Still not convinced that women can benefit from resistance training? Other than the fact that it can increase your BMR, which will help you lose fat and keep it off, research has also shown that resistance training helps prevent osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is characterized by a decrease in bone mass and bone density and an increased risk of fracture. According to the American Council on Exercise (ACE), up to one-third of women will be diagnosed with osteoporosis, with complications that are painful, disfiguring and debilitating.

There are still many other important benefits of resistance training that both men and women of all ages can obtain. Some of these include:

- Helps control blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Reduced risk of diabetes
- Increased muscular strength and endurance
- Psychological well-being
- Improved posture
- Helps manage lower back pain
- Helps prevent falls in elderly
- Improved ability to perform daily activities

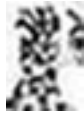
Resistance training can be done anywhere and does not necessarily require specialized equipment or an expensive gym membership. It can be performed with free weights, cables, weight machines, resistance bands, and even just your own body weight. No matter what tools are used, it is important to gradually overload your muscles with increases in intensity and weight, as well as variety to achieve gains. For best results, incorporate resistance training into your routine 2-3 times per week, performing 8-10 exercises with a focus on your larger muscle groups like chest, back, and legs. The resistance should be heavy or intense enough so that you can perform 8-12 repetitions and 2-3 sets.

What's motivating about starting a resistance training program is that you are likely to see rapid improvements in strength and muscle tone within the first 3-4 weeks. Following this initial adaptation phase however, these improvements may start occurring at a slower pace but don't get discouraged. It's

only natural for improvements to start tapering off as your fitness level improves. To help keep you motivated and to continually see improvements, remember that variety is the spice of life. Periodically changing up your program not only helps to force your body to adapt, which is necessary for fitness gains, but it will also help prevent boredom.

Research has proven that the benefits of resistance training are no longer in question. A safe and properly designed program, along with a healthy diet, cardiovascular exercise and flexibility training will provide you with a total and complete fitness routine. It is always best to consult a health and/or fitness professional before beginning any exercise routine.

Michele Warmerdam is a health educator with UCSD Nutrition Link, an elementary school nutrition education program, as well as a certified personal trainer with ACE, NASM, and NCSF. Nutrition Link is funded through the USDA's Food Stamp Program and the Network for a Healthy California.



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