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SEPT/OCT 2011

DISPLAY UNTIL OCT. 17, 2011
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How
to be
a

Heavyweight

5

reasons to start strength training now

Do you steer clear of the sometimes intimidating weight room at your gym and instead head for the spin, yoga or cardio areas? Even if you exercise regularly, you're missing out if you're among the estimated 83 percent of women who don't lift weights, says Joan Pagano, a personal trainer in New York City and author of *Strength Training for Women* (DK Adult).

A study published in the *Journal of Strength & Conditioning Research* showed that pumping iron two times a week can decrease back pain by 18 percent after 16 weeks, and by 42 percent if you're strength training four times a week. More research has found that just 30 minutes of strength training two to three times a week can improve cholesterol and blood pressure numbers, increase bone density and speed fat loss. In fact, the average adult can lose about 4 pounds of fat and add about 3 pounds of muscle lifting weights over a 10-week period!

"If more women realized how transformative weight training can be, more of us would be vigilant about doing it," says Pagano. To inspire you to venture past the treadmills and into the weight room (or even to simply dust off those dumbbells in the back of your closet), read on. Here are five reasons to start lifting—plus simple moves you can do in a quiet corner of the gym or at home.





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If you only do yoga, you're not challenging your muscles as much as you should.

No. 1

To build strength, muscles need to be challenged to their max. And while yoga can be strenuous, it has its limits. "Although using only your body weight can be challenging when you first start doing yoga, your muscles quickly adapt, so the benefits diminish over time," Pagano says. But when you lift weights, you can keep taxing your muscles and get stronger by gradually increasing the amount of weight you lift. Another benefit? You can target specific muscles, such as your shoulders, triceps and biceps, more effectively. While yoga engages groups of muscles to give you overall toning, the poses don't allow you to isolate muscles the same way you can with weights, says Pagano.



Ready to give strength training a try? These moves work the upper and lower body at the same time, so you use more muscles and burn more calories than if you were to work either your upper or lower body alone. Do the following routine, designed by Patrick Goudeau, a Los Angeles-based Nike Elite personal trainer, three times a week on non-consecutive days, starting with a set of 5-pound dumbbells. Repeat the workout two to three times, making sure to exhale when the muscles are being taxed and inhale when they return to a lengthened or relaxed state.

1 ★ *Lunge curl to press*

Stand with your feet about hip-width apart, arms at your sides and a dumbbell in each hand. Step your right foot back about 2 feet, landing on the ball of your right foot. Bending your knees, lower your body until your left thigh is parallel to floor. Curl weights to your shoulders, palms facing each other. Press weights overhead [A], then lower back down to shoulder height. Lower weights to your sides and lift your right knee in front of your body to hip height [B]. Repeat 4 to 6 times, then switch sides.

2 ★ *Squat to press with triceps extension*

Stand holding one dumbbell at each end in front of you at chest level, palms facing each other. Step your right foot 1 foot to the right. Bend your knees, squatting until your thighs are almost parallel with the floor [A]. Do 3 pulses, lifting and lowering your butt about 2 inches, then straighten your legs as you lift the weight overhead. Keeping your elbows in place, lower the weight behind your head [B]. Press the weight back up and repeat 2 times. Bring it back to chest level, and repeat entire sequence 8 to 10 times. Switch sides and repeat.

Strength training revs your metabolism.

No.

2

Your metabolism is the rate at which your body burns energy, or calories, to function. Whether you're sleeping, eating or exercising, your body is torching calories—and if your metabolism is revving like a high-performance sports car rather than a 20-year-old hooptie, you'll burn more calories without even trying. The secret to a robust metabolism is building lean muscle, says Ginger Schirmer, R.D., Ph.D., a Dallas-based exercise physiologist and yoga instructor. "The good news is that you can make a slow metabolism faster simply by lifting weights," she says.

And those results don't take ages to see: "Studies show that after a hard workout, you'll burn about 100 extra calories a day for up to three days," says Wayne Westcott, Ph.D., director of fitness research at Quincy College in Quincy, Mass., and author of *Get Stronger, Feel Younger* (Rodale).

3 ★ *Burpee with renegade rows*

Stand with feet about hip-width apart, arms at your sides and a weight in each hand, palms facing in. Squat down and lower weights to the floor outside your feet. Keeping hands on weights, jump or step your feet behind you so your body forms a long line (plank) **[A]**. Lift your right elbow straight up and slightly back, keeping your arm close to your body, until your elbow is slightly higher than your hip **[B]**. Lower the weight and switch sides. Jump or step to a squat position and stand. Repeat 10 to 12 times.

4 ★ *Side lunge shoulder combo*

Stand with feet together. Hold a dumbbell in each hand, arms at your sides, palms facing in. Step your left leg as far to the left as you can. Keeping your weight over your buttocks and hips, and your right leg straight, lower into a side lunge until your left thigh is almost parallel to the floor. Lift both weights in front of you to shoulder height, palms facing each other **[A]**. Push off your left leg back to standing while extending your arms out to the sides at shoulder height **[B]**. Lower your arms to the starting position and repeat 6 to 8 times, then switch sides, lunging with your right leg.



Weight training makes you more flexible.

No.

3

Yes, you read that right: Yoga and stretching aren't the only keys to increasing your flexibility. In fact, research shows that strength training using your full range of motion may be even better than static stretching when it comes to building overall flexibility. In a University of North Dakota study, college students did either full-range resistance training or static stretching three times a week for five weeks. In the end, the group who stretched didn't increase their flexibility any more than the group that lifted weights. In some cases, those students who spent time working out in the weight room experienced greater gains in flexibility.

"As you lift a weight, your muscle contracts; and as you lower the weight over the full range, your muscle stretches, which is where you get the flexibility benefits," says Jim Whitehead, Ed.D., associate professor of physical education, exercise science and wellness at the University of North Dakota in Grand Fork. "And if you're flexible, you

5 ★ Dip and bridge to curl

Sit on the floor with your feet flat and your knees bent. Hold one weight in each hand, palms facing in, and position your hands a few inches behind your hips. With your hands on the weights, lift your hips straight up and a few inches off the floor. From this position, bend your elbows and lower your butt toward the floor and do 8 to 12 tricep dips, bending your elbows to lift and lower your butt [A]. Walk your feet out farther in front of you, and lift your hips until they're almost in line with your knees. Shift your weight so you can balance on your right hand as you do a bicep curl with your left arm, keeping your elbow relaxed and close to your body and lifting the weight to your shoulder [B]. Then balance on your left hand as you do a bicep curl with your right arm. Alternate curls for 8 to 12 reps.



★ Conquer weight room nerves

Want to lift weights at the gym but feel a little intimidated?

- 1. Figure out what's making you feel nervous** Don't know how to use the equipment? Worried you're not "fit" enough to fit in? "Once you identify where your fear is coming from you can overcome it," says Wayne C. Miller, Ph.D., professor of biomedical sciences at West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine in Lewisburg. For example, asking someone for help with a machine can help ease your discomfort.
- 2. Ask about the crowds** Find out when the weight room is less crowded. Having fewer people to deal with can make the weight room more approachable.
- 3. Buddy up** There's strength in numbers, so ask a friend to join you, or share a trainer.

Weightlifting can help maintain bone mass—maybe even more than calcium.

No. 4

"When muscles contract, they shorten and pull on your bones, which stimulates bone growth," Pagano says. Since women can lose up to 20 percent of their bone density in the five to seven years after menopause, boosting bone strength is crucial. And weight training is one of the most effective ways to do it: In a University of Arizona study, women ages 44 to 66 were split into a strength-training group or a non-strength-training group; all took calcium supplements. After one year, the non-strength group lost about a half percent of their bone density, while the strength trainers increased bone density by 1 percent to 2 percent. After four years, the women who continued to strength train maintained that gain. Researchers noted that weights need to be heavy enough that you can only do two sets of six to eight reps. You need heavy weights to tax your muscles enough to pull on the bone, says Tim Lohman, Ph.D., emeritus professor of physiology at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

No. 5

You'll build strength that will help prevent common aches and pains.

Sitting at your computer all day, lifting heavy grocery bags and other everyday activities can throw your body out of whack. Yet the stronger you are, the less chance you have of injuring yourself while performing these daily tasks, Pagano says. "If you're not strong, pushing, pulling or kicking something can challenge your body in a way that it's not able to handle, which is when injury happens," she says. "That's why your friend throws her back out bending the 'wrong' way or your mother-in-law pulls her groin by pushing a box with her foot. If they had more muscle tone, their bodies could handle these kinds of normal challenges." ✖