

Resistance Training & the Older Adult



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More people than ever are living to be much older and wiser these days. In the year 2000, there was an estimated 35 million people that were 65 years of age or older. That was 13% of the population of the United States at that time. The number of older adults is projected to increase by 74% over the next 30 years. Why not enjoy those golden years even more by maintaining strength and stamina through a regular exercise program?

Just because you may have never participated in an exercise program in your early years, does not mean you cannot start now. It is a known fact that an older adult can have strength gains that significantly surpass those of younger training individuals. Since the older adult is much wiser in years, his/her training program needs to be much smarter as well.

The majority of the chronic illnesses that impact older adults are brought on

due to a lack of consistent physical activity. This lack of exercise and increase in a more sedentary lifestyle results in a loss of muscle and energy. Daily activities like taking out the trash or climbing a set of stairs become monumental tasks. Not only will resistance training increase muscle size and strength, but increases will take place in bone density as well. These positive effects will restore or greatly increase the functional capabilities of the older adult. Stronger muscles and better balance will assist in the prevention of falls thus reducing the incidence of injuries. Everyday activities become more enjoyable and less taxing on the better-fit body.

The International Sports Science Association divides older adults into three categories: 50-65 years old, 65-80, and 80 years and over. Prior to starting an exercise program, all three of these groups should get medical clearance from their doctor. If you are preparing to start exercising for the first time or starting back up after a long lay-off, you need to be patient and build the intensity slowly. No matter what you may think your current condition is, you should fill out a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PARQ) and have an assessment performed by a fitness professional. The PARQ will cover medical history, current lifestyle and exercise history. A fitness assessment should also be performed to identify limitations in cardiovascular condition, strength and joints that have less than a normal Range of Motion (ROM).

Based on the data collected from the PARQ and the results of your assessment, a safe and effective training program can be developed.

The program that is developed should consist of exercises that utilize your own bodyweight, free weights and some machines based movements. Exercises should involve all three planes of movement (Frontal, Sagittal and Transverse) since daily life activities take place in all three planes. An Integrated Strength Training program will allow you to build greater overall strength and balance. It is a program that takes you through conditioning phases allowing you to improve in each phase before moving on to the next. The phases include Core conditioning, Balance and Flexibility training, Neuromuscular Stabilization and Strength and Power conditioning also. It is a great training methodology designed around preventing injury and increasing performance.

Your program should incorporate exercise balls, stretch cords, medicine balls, dumbbells, and take you from a stable platform to an unstable platform. Increasing the difficulty to stabilize yourself will increase muscle strength on both sides of a joint and generate better balance between the muscle(s) performing the movement and the synergistic supporting muscle group. So, get the most out of your training efforts and challenge yourself with each and every movement. The end result will be a stronger, healthier, more energetic, and very ACTIVE older adult. I wish you years of health and happiness.