

This is an article written for the monthly newsletter at 24/7 X-Press Fitness Center in Des Moines, Iowa. This was from the June 2009 Issue.

Don't neglect your muscles during the summer

A lot of people head outdoors to exercise during the spring and summer and why not? It seems like we've had an unusually long and cool spring this year. When visiting with members that I haven't seen for a while, they often say that they run or walk outdoors or are riding their bikes instead of coming in to the fitness center, and that's great for cardiovascular fitness. But don't forget that you have other muscles besides your heart that need exercise. Your skeletal muscles need constant attention or they will atrophy if you don't continue to use and work them. Many people get into the routine of doing a strength training routine during the winter but when spring comes, they go outside for their cardiovascular exercise and neglect their strength training. This article will discuss the benefits of a strength training routine and why you should stick with it year-round.

There are two main aspects to exercise – cardiovascular exercise and strength training. Cardiovascular exercises are those that increase your heart rate and breathing for a sustained period. These exercises work the heart and lungs and improve your cardiovascular fitness and endurance. Exercises include walking, running, bicycling, swimming, inline skating and similar activities. Strength training involves the use of skeletal muscles in doing work against resistance. Skeletal muscles are those of the arms, shoulders, core, hips and legs. Normally the resistance is provided by lifting weights, but resistance training can also be done by lifting your own body weight (e.g. push ups, pull ups) and through the use of resistance bands.

Resistance, or strength, training is an important aspect of fitness. It's common to see people who only do cardiovascular exercise. Everyone can and should do some form of resistance exercise to strengthen muscles. Here are three important reasons.

- 1) Muscles are necessary to move your body and limbs, and are important for stability. As people age, they tend to lose muscle mass. This is the result of aging, but is really due mostly to the lack of use as we age. People tend to be less active as they age, and do less physical work. If muscles aren't used, they shrink. Feebleness or frailty of older people is really just a loss of muscle mass. To remain active and functional as you age, you should continue to exercise and strengthen your muscles to fight off this natural tendency to lose muscle mass as you age. If you don't use it, you will lose it when it comes to muscles.
- 2) Muscles are metabolically active tissue. Because they do work, they consume energy. How often have you heard someone say that their metabolism has slowed once they reached 30 or 40 years of age? Well, this happens as we get older. Part of the reason again is that we tend to be less active as we age but another important reason is that we tend to lose our metabolically active muscle tissue as we age. Our lean body mass decreases and along with it goes our basal metabolic rate. Thus we need less energy to run our body because there is less of our body to run! So our energy need decreases and if we don't decrease our food consumption, it ends up as fat deposits on our bodies.
- 3) Doing strength training exercises help maintain bone mass. We have all heard that we lose bone density as we age. This is more common in women but also occurs in men. There are two ways exercise can help to maintain or even improve your bone density. One is to take part in an activity that has impact on your body, such as running. Each time you land on your foot, it sends a shock wave through your skeletal system, which has the effect of strengthening the bone tissue. The other way is to include resistance exercises in your exercise program. Lifting heavy weight will create stress on your bones which in turn strengthens the bone tissue.

We have all heard of elderly people falling and breaking a hip. This is partly due to lack of strength and balance, and also because of decreased bone density. All three of these, strength, balance and bone density, can be improved through the use of a lifelong resistance training program.

Hopefully I've convinced you that you should be doing some strength training if you haven't already been doing so. If you don't currently do strength training, please consider starting. But if you do it in the winter but let it trail off during the summer months, consider maintain a resistance program year-round. Even

one or two short (30 min) but intense strength sessions per week will allow you to maintain the strength you have developed over the winter.

So go ahead and take your cardio exercise outside in the summer if you like, but consider maintaining a strength training program all summer long here at the fitness center. Keep in mind it's air conditioned here, so it's often more pleasant inside than it is outside too!

Contact David Ertl (689-1254) (dertl@7flags.com) if you have questions about setting up a resistance training program for yourself. We offer a complimentary personal training session for all members, so if you haven't taken advantage of yours, this would be a great way to use it. Or, if you would like a refresher or some new ideas, again we can help. Consider signing up for a one-time personal training session to either begin or re-ignite your strength exercise routine.

Quick Fit Tip of the Month: Did you know that muscle tissue burns six times more energy per pound than fat does? By doing resistance training on a consistent basis, you can maintain and increase your muscle tissue and therefore increase your metabolism and the number of calories you burn 24 hours a day.

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