

Be Well Aware – Health Article



Creating an Effective Workout

National guidelines recommend that most adults engage in 150 minutes of physical activity each week – that is, just 30 minutes of activity five days a week. According to WHO, physical activity “refers to all movement including during leisure time, for transport to get to and from places, or as part of a person’s work” (WHO, 2020). It may also encompass any moderate to vigorous exercise, such as walking, running, or cycling.

In addition to aerobic exercise, the CDC recommends engaging in muscle-strengthening activities at least two days a week to help build and maintain strength required for everyday activities - lifting groceries, climbing stairs, rising from a chair, or moving heavy items around the house.

When you think of muscle-strengthening, you may imagine Schwarzenegger-type men and women lifting heavy weights in the gym. Realistically, strength exercises are any activity that require your muscles to work hard. There are a variety of methods to strengthen muscles at home or the gym.

A few examples include:

- bodyweight training – using your own bodyweight to provide resistance against gravity (i.e. push-ups, sit-ups, and squats)
- heavy gardening (e.g., digging, shoveling)
- weightlifting
- climbing stairs or a hill
- working with resistance bands
- dance
- some forms of yoga

Muscle-strengthening exercises may consist of total-body workouts or split training (muscle targeting). The main goal of a total-body workout is to target all the major muscle groups simultaneously: arms, legs, back, abdominals, hips, chest, and shoulders. A split training workout allows an individual to isolate one or two of these major groups, thus concentrating on training more specific muscles within the selected group(s).



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The ideal workout routine will effectively incorporate both the total-body and split training exercise methods. The combined movements of the total-body session help to reduce risk of muscle imbalances while split training focuses on fatiguing different muscles each session to meet a desired muscular definition. When opting to practice split training, there are a few areas to pay attention to when designing an effective workout.

The following are a few tips to increase the efficacy of your strength workouts:

- **Don't skip the warm-up or cool down.** The warmup should primarily focus on the muscle groups to be worked for that session. For instance, you do not want to spend too much time warming up your legs for a session that is primarily focused on the upper body. Congruently, you want to spend sufficient time warming up the target muscles to ensure the blood is flowing, thus, providing oxygen, and increasing flexibility and efficiency. The same concept applies to the cooldown. It is intended to gradually relax the target muscles and reduce soreness.
- **Practice proper form over intensity.** Do not focus on trying to lift the heaviest weight or squat all the way to the floor. Progression will occur gradually over time and with consistency. Instead, focus on developing accurate form with slow and controlled movements for each exercise. Keep in mind the major checkpoints of the Anatomic Kinetic Chain – feet and ankles, knees, hip and pelvis, shoulders, and head and neck. When one is in motion, it creates a chain effect on the movement and alignment of various joints and segments within the chain. As a result, poor form can prompt injuries, slow gains, and bodily misalignment.

- **Challenge your muscles by slowly increasing weight or resistance.** If you are a beginner, your focus should be selecting a weight that tires the target muscle(s) towards the tail end of a set. A single set consists of 8 to 12 repetitions (reps) of a single exercise. As you approach the last few reps, the exercise should require more effort while still allowing you to maintain good form. Using progressively heavier weights or increasing resistance makes muscles stronger. As you progress, remember that you should be able to perform each set (two to four) with good form with the target muscles feeling tired by the last few reps.
- **Alternate between days to allow recovery.** Strength training causes little tears in the muscles that are necessary for growth and strengthening. For this reason, you want to give your muscle groups at least 48 hours of recovery in between workout sessions. This allows you to alternate between muscle groups used in a single workout. For instance, on Monday you may opt to work the chest, back, and arms. On Tuesday, focus on the calves, quads, glutes, and hamstrings to allow your upper body to recover.
- **Consistency.** Like most things, change does not occur overnight. Any improvements in overall health require persistence and consistency. Try adhering to a regular routine and planning your workouts in advance until it becomes a lifestyle habit.



References:

- <https://www.acefitness.org/education-and-resources/lifestyle/blog/459/what-is-the-difference-between-total-body-strength-training-routines-and-split-routines/>
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