

Active Living Tips for Older Adults



What the researchers say - in plain language. Sponsored by the Active Living Coalition for Older Adults (ALCOA).

The Power of Strength Training for Older Adults

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Over the years, adults lose muscle mass and therefore strength simply because they are getting older. This normal loss in muscle size can cause difficulties in living safely and independently. Older adults may become less able or unable to participate in favourite activities. They may be at risk of falling or simply unable to get out of a chair. But there is good news. No matter what your age or ability you can get stronger.

In the 1990's researchers showed that strength training is helpful for older adults. You can do strength training if you are healthy, active and in your sixties. You can also do it if you are less active or frail and in your nineties. Both Health Canada and the American College of Sports Medicine now include strength training in their recommendations for physical activity. Thanks to this new information, weight training programs for older adults are becoming more popular and are now available in many communities.

What is strength training?

Canada's Physical Activity Guide suggests that you can do strength training by:

- Carrying your laundry, groceries or other heavy objects
- Lifting dumbbells or barbells that you buy at a store

- Lifting weights that you make from cans or containers filled with water or sand
- Doing push-ups against the wall
- Using a weight-lifting machine

Whatever weight or resistance you use, it must be heavy enough to improve your strength. You can do exercises at home as part of your daily activities or in a gym or weight-training centre.



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Copies of the ALCOA Research Update and research references related to this article are available in print from the ALCOA office or can be downloaded from www.ALCOA.ca.

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Ce document est aussi disponible en français.

Being active is safe for most people. Start slowly and build up. Not sure? Consult with a health-care professional.

For more tips on physical activity check out Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living for Older Adults, available free at 1-888-334-9769 or www.paguide.com

Health practitioners, leaders and others please post, copy and distribute this article to older adults.

What are the benefits of strength training?

When you do strength training, you will regain some of the muscle mass you have lost due to aging. You will be able to do your daily activities with more ease, balance and confidence. In addition to improving your strength research shows that you will:

- Have healthier bones
- Have better posture
- Decrease your body fat
- Reduce your risk of falling
- Be able to walk faster
- React quicker
- Climb stairs more easily
- Rise out of a chair more easily

Why else would you want to do strength training? One senior said strength training enabled him to continue activities that he enjoyed.

Where can you find strength training programs?

Look for training programs at community health centres, community resource centres, YMCAs, YWCAs, recreation centres, fitness clubs, continuing education programs in neighbourhood schools, seniors organizations, universities or colleges. If the one near you does not have a strength training program for older adults - see if you can get them to start one! It simply makes good sense.



How do you train safely?

- ✓ Always talk to your doctor, health-care provider or fitness instructor before you make any big changes in your physical activities.
- ✓ Get help from a qualified fitness instructor to help you do your exercises properly. Join a strength training program or get one on one instruction.
- ✓ Breathe naturally. Do not hold your breath.
- ✓ Start slowly.
- ✓ Increase the number of times you do an exercise before you increase the weight.
- ✓ Always use the proper technique. Don't lift so much weight that you can't use the proper technique.

How do you do strength training?

For best results at home or at the gym, the experts suggest that you:

- ✓ Do your training two to three times a week with one day in between.
- ✓ Always exercise the main muscle groups: arms, chest, back, abdomen, and legs. This will involve 8 to 10 different exercises.
- ✓ Do at least one 'set' of each exercise. This means repeating the same exercise 8-12 times before resting.
- ✓ You can improve your strength more if you do two to three sets of each exercise.
- ✓ Rest for about two minutes between each set.
- ✓ If you are a beginner, choose a weight that you can move 10 to 15 times in one set.
- ✓ Once you are able to do an exercise more than 10-15 times in one set, it's time to increase the weight.
- ✓ You can then use a heavier weight that you can move 8 to 10 times in one set. This is called progression and it is necessary if you want to improve your strength.
- ✓ Train once a week when you reach your strength goal so you will maintain it.