

**- Exercise**

## Benefits of strength training stack up

---

Taranaki Daily News · 18 Feb 2022 · 17

---

Aerobic exercise used to be considered the holy grail of fitness, but it turns out that as you get older, strength training may be even more important.



Muscle strength peaks in a person's 30s. However, exercising to build muscle does more than simply maintain strength; it could add years of life and help prevent cognitive decline. Links have been established between stronger muscles and a decreased chance of developing cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer.

Now Australian researchers have found that parts of the brain affected by Alzheimer's disease are protected for at least a year after a period of strength training.

The research, published in 2020 in *Neuroimage: Clinical*, showed that six months of strength training led to cognitive improvements in people with a mild impairment, and significantly slowed brain degeneration connected with Alzheimer's.

The study's 100 participants did strength-training sessions twice weekly for six months and were assessed at the start and end of the study, then a year later.

Professor Michael Valenzuela, of the University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Centre, said the cognitive benefits were still evident at the last round of testing and loss of volume in the hippocampus was largely prevented.

"Exercise stimulates a whole cocktail of biological changes in the bloodstream," he said, however, "How you get from lifting a dumbbell to an improvement in the hippocampus is not clear at the moment."

Even before pumping iron could be linked with more nimble minds, other everyday benefits were already well established.

Bone density levels, libidos and muscle mass all fall as a result of age-related testosterone decline. But by helping increase testosterone, strength training contributes to stronger bones and more energy all round.

British personal trainer Matt Roberts, author of the book *Younger, Fitter, Stronger: The Revolutionary 8-week Fitness Plan for Men*, says too much cardio exercise speeds up the decline of testosterone production. This accelerates the natural loss of muscle, which is typically replaced by fat.

“If men take the time to increase their testosterone levels through lifting, it will burn through body fat and build muscle mass,” Roberts says.

“So once men get into their 40s, they should focus less on pounding pavements to burn off calories and more on maintaining their decreasing testosterone levels.”

Strength training also helps develop stronger bones, reducing the risk of fractures and osteoporosis.

Research has shown that the natural pace of bone loss from ageing can be slowed by strength training, with some studies even demonstrating that the exercises can help to build bone.

This is particularly important because areas where bones are often strengthened – spine, hips, wrists and ribs – tend to be common fracture sites.

The really good news is that it is never too late to start strength training.

However, to avoid injury, it is a good idea to speak to a personal trainer or your GP about which exercises may be right for you.