- Exercise



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Why do we need to strength train?

Words: Lucy Waterlow

You'll be reaching for a dumbbell when you read all these benefits

There are so many reasons to strength train to boost your physical and mental health, so the real question is why wouldn't you strength train when you can gain all these benefits? Starting with the physical, the gains include increased muscle strength, enhanced bone density and improved joint stability and balance. Not only will these elements make you a better athlete if you're active doing other sports, they will also boost your everyday life.

Life benefits

As Personal Trainer Emma Bord explains, "The physical benefits of strength training will consequently improve your ability to perform daily tasks without pain, and reduce the risk of hurting yourself in the process. Simple tasks like carrying shopping or lifting a child can put you at risk of hurting yourself if you don't have the muscle strength to support your joints. Ensuring these muscles are conditioned and ready for action will counteract the challenges of day to day life."

Emma continues, "As strength training will improve balance, coordination and posture, as well as strengthening joints, this can help reduce the risk of falls and injuries. In addition, this form of training may help reduce the risk of chronic diseases, such as diabetes and osteoporosis."

Weight management

Maintaining a healthy weight is recommended to avoid long-term health issues and strength work can help with this – both during and after your workout. As Emma explains, "Strength training aids weight management by boosting the metabolism and building lean muscle mass. By increasing your metabolic rate you will not only be burning calories while you workout, but also find yourself burning more calories at rest. This will enhance your heart health, reducing the risk of metabolic diseases and improving your overall wellbeing." Wait, what is this magical after effect of burning calories while sitting on the sofa after a workout? The scientific term is Excess Post-exercise Oxygen Consumption (or EPOC for short). It occurs due to your body needing more oxygen after strenuous exercise to aid recovery and this process uses more calories. Just how many extra calories are burnt at rest depends on a number of >

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factors including your age, gender and genetic make-up – but strength work has been found to be the most effective for this 'afterburn' compared to easy, aerobic exercise (such as a gentle jog or leisurely swim). This is because the short, powerful moves tend to be more anaerobic – ie performed by your body without using oxygen – and recruits fast-twitch muscle fibres over slow-twitch ones, so the body then needs more oxygen afterwards to recover.

Mental health

The mental health benefits of strength training are immense too. The exercise will release endorphins in your brain. These are feel-good hormones that boost your mood reducing feelings of anxiety and depression. "The actual movement of lifting weights can be empowering and offer a sense of achievement and personal power, which can help establish a positive and happier mindset," Emma adds.

Julia Buckley, a fellow fitness trainer, agrees, "There is something about lifting weights or mastering bodyweight exercises that gives you real confidence and belief in what your body can do," she observes. "It is very empowering. There is the mood boost you get from the workout itself and then there's the long-term effect of feeling strong and capable, which you carry with you into all aspects of your life."

Confidence boost

As well as enjoying how strength training makes them feel, Emma and Julia say many of their clients love how it makes them look. This enhances their mental health again, so they have a more positive body image and feel more confident. Emma, who you can follow on Instagram @emmabordpt, says, "As strength training can help with weight loss and improved muscular definition and posture, one of the subsequent benefits I often see is a boost in personal confidence and self esteem, making people feel more resilient and capable in all aspects of their lives."

Injury-proof

If the health benefits alone don't convince you to get started, then how about the performance boost you can gain if you're someone who enjoys aerobic exercise such as running? Not only will strength work help you gain a new PB because you'll increase your power and improve your running form by becoming more efficient, it will help you stay injury-free so you can carry on doing more of what you love. Julia and Emma are both keen runners themselves and recommend strength training to enhance and support the experience of training and racing. "I always tell people who are getting started in running that if you want to keep running, strength work is essential," Julia says. "The key thing for runners to remember is strength work is not a separate 'extra', it will actually make them a better runner. It's an investment in their running progress, not a diversion from it. Two short strength sessions a week can make a massive difference to their running performance and help keep them injury free – that's why the world's best runners do it.

"Planning helps a lot – schedule your strength training in like you do your runs and keep it short and focused." Julia was an ultra runner before finding a love of strength training and she runs her own online gym at *juliabuckleyfitness.com*. She thinks many more runners will become converts to lifting weights if they give it a chance.

"There is something about mastering bodyweight exercises that gives you real confidence in what your body can do"



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"I've actually been there myself, at one time I thought strength training was for 'meat-heads' and not my thing, now it's a key part of my training," she reveals. Julia continues that even if you don't end up enjoying the sessions as much as you love running, "the benefits are too important to ignore." But she adds that in her experience, runners who take up strength training never look back. "A lot of people who are into running – and think running is the only exercise they'll ever enjoy – come to strength work because of how it supports their running, but stay with it because of how it makes them feel.

"You will feel stronger, move better, and protect yourself from injury. Ultimately, it will improve your quality of life."



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