Strength Training

How to start a strength training program

What is strength?

*Strength* refers to your muscles’ ability to exert force and control movement. For example, flexible muscles will help you bend over to pick up a box, but it’s your muscular strength that lets you lift it.

Your physical therapist will determine the strength of your major muscle groups and help you to strengthen your weaker muscles through weight-resistance exercises. As we age, we tend to lose strength in our leg muscles more than in our arms. Your physical therapist will help you start a strength training program for the muscles you need most to maintain independent walking and function.

Why should I include strengthening in my exercise program?

For a long time, it was thought that only shot-putters and weight-lifters should participate in strength training. New research shows that everyone, including older adults, can benefit from strength training. Some studies show that seniors can increase their strength up to 200% after starting a high-intensity strength training program. Not only can you increase your strength, but you can also improve your ability to walk, balance, and do everyday activities.

Research shows that it does not matter what shape you are in or how old you are when you start. What matters is the intensity, duration, and frequency of your exercise program.
How can I increase my strength?

You can increase your strength by starting a moderate- to high-intensity strength training program. Your physical therapist will teach you exercises to strengthen your leg and arm muscles and show you what weights to use.

- Do your strengthening exercises 3 times a week.
- Each exercise should be done for 8 to 10 repetitions, 1 to 2 sets. Do each exercise 10 times and then start over and do each exercise 10 times again. This is also called doing 10 repetitions for 2 sets.
- Every 6 to 8 weeks, look at the weights you are using and try to increase the amount you are lifting. You will receive instructions on how much to increase the weight you are lifting and when to stop making increases.

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