

Beginning a Weight Training Program

What Is Weight Training? Weight training means adding resistance to the body's natural movements in order to make those movements more difficult, and encourage the muscles to become stronger.

Why Weight Train? Weight training increases fitness by:

- Increasing muscle strength and endurance
- Enhancing the cardiovascular system
- Increasing flexibility
- Maintaining the body's fat within acceptable limits

Weight training can be an important component of your fitness program, regardless of your age or gender.

What Equipment Is Needed To Weight Train?

Weight training programs can be done with free weights or with weight machines. Free weights are less expensive than weight machines and are more easily adapted to smaller and larger body types. Machines are safer than most free weights because the weight is more controlled.

With multiple purpose machines, like the Universal™ gym, several individuals can exercise simultaneously on the same piece of equipment within a small space. If you use free weights, select a set of bar bells or dumbbells and a weight bench for the upper extremities and bar bells for the lower extremities.

For all lifting, use a weight belt. Some people feel that weight gloves give them better grip strength, but they are not necessary. Good athletic shoes that provide firm floor traction are a must.

How Do I Start A Weight Training Program?

First, you should establish goals for your program. Decide if you want to exercise to obtain good muscular tone and cardiovascular endurance, to build muscle strength in a particular muscle group to improve sports performance or to rehabilitate an injured muscle.

If you want to improve muscle tone and cardiovascular performance, design your program along the lines of a circuit program. In such a program, exercises are done at least four times a week for approximately 20 to 30 minutes a session, and very short rest periods (30 seconds or less) are allowed between exercises. This program would generally consist of 15 to 20 repetitions of an exercise for each major muscle group.

If you want to build strength, you should exercise the muscle group you are strengthening to fatigue. This program incorporates fewer repetitions than circuit training. For example, you would do three sets of repetitions, but only 8 to 10 repetitions per set, with a longer rest period of 60 to 90 seconds between each exercise. This may be done every other day, but not as frequently as a circuit program because the fatigued muscles need longer to recover.

If you want to rehabilitate an injured muscle, your program would be similar to the circuit training program of higher repetitions and lower weights. However, a rehabilitation program, unlike a circuit training program, focuses on working the injured muscle group.

An exercise professional, like a certified athletic trainer, a sports physical therapist, an exercise physiologist or a strength and conditioning coach, can help you design a program that's suitable for your needs.

Limitations

It is extremely important to check with your doctor before beginning a weight training program, particularly if you are over 30 or have any physical limitations. If you have musculoskeletal problems, check with an orthopaedist to make sure that the program will not aggravate those problems.

Precautions

To avoid injury when weight training, you should:

- Wear appropriate clothing
- Keep the weight training area clean and free of debris
- Stay well hydrated while lifting.
- Get adequate rest.
- Eat sensibly.
- Stretch after warming up but before lifting.

- Always use a spotter when doing bench presses and squats.
- Lift with a buddy, whenever possible.

Source: American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine and the National Athletic Trainers Association