

## Exercise and the Older Women

Are you finding that you are not as strong as you use to be? Are you becoming tired or fatigued easily? Have you noticed that simple tasks such as carrying groceries or climbing a flight of stairs are becoming increasingly difficult for you? Are you just attributing this to the aging process? Well, it has been suggested that 50% of what we call aging is due to disuse and degeneration of muscle and bone tissue (O'Brien & Vertinsky).

Research is showing significant benefits of a resistive strength training exercise program as we age. Studies have shown that as women age, their muscle mass may decline as much as 20% to 40%. This decline is believed to be a result of a reduction in muscle fiber number, size and reduced nerve innervations, which leads to a decline in functional strength and endurance. However, resistive strength training has shown great potential in retarding the effects of aging of the muscle fibers. Simply speaking, your muscles need to be worked, overloaded or challenged in order to maintain or gain strength.

A strength-training program should first begin with a thorough physical from your physician. Then you should set realistic goals that you wish to accomplish. Always remember that you want to “train your muscles, not strain your muscles” in order to prevent injury.

Start your resistive exercise program with a good stretching regiment. This helps to warm-up the muscles and prepares them for exercises. Use lightweights to help your body adjust to the new workout routine. It is very common to feel some mild muscle soreness for the first two to three days of beginning a new exercise program. This is called delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS). Note: See your physician if the soreness persists for more than 5 days.

As you continue with a regular exercise program, your body will acclimate to the new exercises, and you may begin to feel that you are ready to increase your workout load. Just remember to proceed slowly. Lifting heavy weights too early in the program can lead to prolonged muscle soreness and muscle strains, so be careful not to over do it. You may want to consider consulting a physical therapist or an athletic trainer for guidance in developing an individualized training program.

It appears that the adage “move it or lose it” may have some validity after all. Routine exercise can help all of us young and old, but we have to start in order to reap the benefits.

### Recent Studies

Studies have shown that older women between the ages of 72-98 years old can more than double the strength of their leg and hip muscles as a result of a strength-training program.

A group of women (average age 87) participated in a 3-day per week fitness-training program for 10 weeks and demonstrated 10% improved walking ability and 30% stair climbing ability.