

# 7 Incredible Benefits of Lifting Weights That Have Nothing to Do With Building Muscle

## Boost your mood, reduce back pain, and much more.

We hate to sound like a broken record, but it really is crucial to incorporate lifting weights into your workout regimen. In fact, when it comes to exercise for older adults, [strength training](#) actually trumps [cardio](#) because preserving muscle is more important than losing fat as you age.

“Every decade, starting in your mid 30s, you lose a percentage of muscle, which affects your [metabolism](#), balance, and ability to brace yourself in the event of an injury,” explains Larysa DiDio, a certified personal trainer and *Prevention's* contributing fitness editor. “By weight training, you build more [muscle](#) to protect your body against injury.”

### So, how often should you lift weights?

Ideally, twice a week—whether you lift free weights, use machines, or do [bodyweight exercises](#), says Rachelle Reed, PhD, CPT, Pure Barre’s manager of training development and barre kinesiologist.

That said, as you get stronger and fitter, both Reed and DiDio agree that you should bump up your sessions to more than two times a week. “You can totally lift every day—just make sure to work on different body parts or train your body differently each day,” DiDio says.

Wondering which muscle groups to focus on? Reed says that depends on your goals. For a full body workout, “many trainers will tell clients to focus on the upper body one day and the lower body a couple days later,” she says. To help you get the most bang for your buck, consider folding in [compound exercises](#) and supersets into your routine, a form of strength training in which you move from one exercise to the next with no rest in between.

In addition to building strength, lifting weights has a host of benefits. Keep reading to learn all the reasons you should pick up a pair of dumbbells (or kettlebells, or dare we say, a barbell) today.

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### You’ll lose weight and burn more calories

While cardio can help you get rid of [belly fat](#), lifting weights helps you build more muscle, which can also help you burn more calories. That’s because muscles are metabolically active, meaning they burn calories even when you’re not exercising. “In fact, muscle tissue burns seven to 10 calories per pound daily, while fat burns only two to three calories per pound daily,” DiDio explains.

What's more, a [2017 study](#) in *Obesity* suggests that weight training combined with a healthy, low-calorie diet, can help preserve lean muscle mass that's lost through aerobic workouts. "When weight loss occurs in the absence of strength training, all facets of body composition are lost," Reed says. "You lose some weight in fat, some in muscle, and some in bone—and it's unfavorable to lose weight that's coming from both muscle and bone." That's why strength training is so important. When people exercise to lose weight, the majority of the weight loss is fat loss.

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## **You'll protect your bones**

As you age, your bones become more brittle and weaker, especially if you're [post-menopausal](#), which is due to lower estrogen levels—the hormone responsible for maintaining bone mass. But lifting weights can help you build bone mineral density through Wolff's Law, which states that bones can grow in response to forces that are placed upon it. In other words, creating pressure on your joints through weight-bearing exercises can actually help you build stronger, healthier bones.

"Strength training involves muscles contracting against the bones they're surrounding," Reed explains. "This force applied to the bones helps improve bone density overtime."

In fact, an [October 2017](#) study from the *Journal of Bone and Mineral Research* shows that high-intensity resistance training exercises, like deadlifts, overhead presses, and back squats, can help improve bone mineral density in women with osteopenia and [osteoporosis](#).

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## **You'll manage stress and boost your mood**

Had a hard day at work and need to release some tension? Time to pick up those weights. Just like any form of exercise, strength training can enhance your mood by releasing feel-good hormones called endorphins.

Recent [research](#) also suggests that exercise, including weight training, may help protect against [Alzheimer's](#) and dementia. Researchers from Columbia University Irving Medical Center discovered that the hormone irisin, which is released during exercise, may help promote neuronal growth in the hippocampus—the area of the brain dedicated to learning and memory.

"Any type of exercise is a mood booster, but weight training makes you feel stronger and it builds the back and neck muscles that are most directly associated with stress," DiDio says.

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## **You'll improve your posture**

If you have a desk job, chances are you're dealing with a case of [rounded shoulders](#) and a [hunched back](#), which place additional pressure on your low back. This can lead to [bad posture](#) and limited range of motion in the shoulders, which are the most flexible joint in the body.

But lifting weights can help reverse this by opening up the chest, strengthening the back muscles, and improving freedom of movement. "It also strengthens your core, which keeps the back in alignment and upright," DiDio says.

Go for multi-joint compound exercises (think a squat to overhead press or a lateral lunge to twist), which can help you work in different planes of motion and muscle groups, saving you time and effort.

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## **You'll reduce back pain**

There's no one reason for [back pain](#), but muscular imbalances, like weak knees and an unstable core, can contribute, among other things. Most people think aches and pain are due to strains, but sometimes, it's a result of bad biomechanics. Your muscles work in a [kinetic chain](#), so if there's a weak link, it can often manifest into a bigger problem in different areas of the body. But by building total-body strength, you can bypass most injuries.

For example, if you have weak hip flexors, it also means you have weak glutes—their opposing muscles. And, "typically they [muscles] don't weaken evenly, so this can also throw your pelvis out of whack, which could affect your gait," DiDio says. "As weak and tight muscles tug and pull, they can cause imbalances and pain, which is your body telling you that something is wrong."

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## **You'll improve memory and brain health**

A [2016 review](#) from the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* shows that physical activity can help prevent or delay cognitive decline in people over 50, regardless of their current neurological state.

When you're moving, your body pumps oxygen-rich blood to your brain, boosting [neuroplasticity](#)—your brain's ability to create new neural connections and adjust to changes in environment. By increasing neuroplasticity, you can better handle stressful situations that come with life and stay sharp.

"Indeed, the American College of Sports Medicine has published several studies investigating the positive effects of different types of exercise on cognitive performance in older adults, and they agree that this is an area of research worthy of further pursuit," Reed notes.

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## **You'll be better in tune with your body**

There's nothing like lifting a pair of weights to help you tune into your senses when you work out. Whether you're doing an overhead press, a plank row, or a goblet squat, lifting weights creates greater awareness around using your breath to help you get the most out of each rep. Plus, doing complex moves can test your listening and cognitive skills—it takes some brain power to process a trainer's cues and execute a move properly!