

[IMAGE]

Better Late than Never

As we reach middle age, our muscles and bones gradually and progressively weaken. Performing strength exercises can counteract these effects, although how long the positive effects last is uncertain. A recent study in the journal *Bone* investigated the long-term protective effects of stronger back muscles on bone mineral density (BMD) in the spine, which is a measure of bone strength.

Fifty postmenopausal women, ages 58-75, were divided into two groups: roughly half completed progressive back-strengthening exercises for two years; the other half did not and were used for comparison. To strengthen their back muscles, the women performed back-arching exercises while wearing a weighted backpack. At the end of the study and again eight years later, the women were examined for BMD, back muscle strength, and physical activity levels.

At the eight-year follow-up, women who had not strengthened their back muscles were almost three times more likely to have fractures in their spine, compared to women who had performed the exercises. At the end of the two-year exercise program, back strength was significantly higher in the exercise group, but BMD was similar to that of the no-exercise group. Both BMD and back strength were significantly higher in the exercise group at the eight-year follow-up, however.

The benefits of back exercises apparently continue up to eight years after cessation, and perhaps even longer. Increasing back strength may reduce your risk for vertebral fractures later in life. Talk to your doctor of chiropractic about ways to safely and effectively strengthen your back muscles.

Reference:

Sinaki M, Itoi E, Wahner HW, et al. Stronger back muscles reduce the incidence of vertebral fractures: A prospective 10-year follow-up of postmenopausal women. *Bone* 2002;30(6), pp. 836-841.

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