

[IMAGE]

Five Strength Training Tips for Women

By Editorial Staff

These days, many women have jumped on the cardio bandwagon and are making a point of hitting the treadmill or the elliptical machine a few times a week. Not a bad idea, considering government guidelines for heart health recommend engaging in 30 minutes or more of moderate exercise three to four days per week.

However, not enough women emphasize strength training in their workout routines. Perhaps it's a fear of getting hurt or doing it "wrong," but many women avoid weights altogether and think of the free-weight section of the gym as the area where the bodybuilders hang out. The following five tips will help educate and encourage you to venture into that muscle-bound area of the gym to get the most out of your weekly workout routines.

1. *Vary your workout with an interval program.* This means that instead of working at the same pace on the treadmill or stationary bike for an hour or more, you should alternate quick bursts of speed with a recovery period. Combine this with a strength training regimen and you're on your way to fitting into those skinny jeans.
2. *Make it a priority to lift weights three times a week.* Beginning a lifting routine once a week is better than not lifting at all, but you aren't going to notice too many changes. Twice a week is better, but still isn't going to give you the results you want. However, any more than three times a week and your muscles won't have enough time to recover between workouts.
3. *Increase the weight you lift over time and lift enough weight to make a difference.* It's important to find the right balance between going for the heaviest weight in the room and going for the lightest. You want to make sure you are lifting enough to make a significant difference. Experts advise choosing a weight you can lift for at least 8-10 reps. Once you can lift a particular weight consistently for 12 reps, go to the next highest weight and go back to lifting it at 8-10 reps and so on. (*Note:* To learn more about how much weight you should be lifting, read Chelsea Cooper's exercise series, "[A Total-Body Workout in Five Easy Steps](#)." The five-part series began in July 2007.)
4. A woman posing in her exercise outfit and holding two dumbbells. - Copyright â Stock Photo /

Register Mark *Exercises that work smaller muscles won't necessarily get you the best results.* Small and large muscles need to work together, as part of a larger complex system, to get you the results you want. That means you need to work the chest, back, shoulders, biceps, triceps and legs. Remember, it's about getting your entire body in shape, not just specific areas or muscle groups.

5. *Traditional crunches aren't the answer.* It's hard to find the motivation to do crunches in the first place, but having to lie flat on the hard floor to perform this exercise would make even the most die-hard workout junkie come up with an excuse. An alternative to traditional crunches is to perform the same motion on an exercise ball. This will help provide some cushion for your back and allow you to work all of your abdominal muscles by providing a complete range of motion.

Now that you've got the basics down, it's important to remember that just getting started is half the battle. There isn't necessarily a one-size-fits-all strength training regimen for women. Start off slowly and build up your stamina. Remember, the first rep and the last rep should look the same, even if you start to slow down toward the end.

A simple strength training routine will help you tone your body so you can wear that new summer bathing suit with confidence and tone up those hips and thighs for your skinny jeans. It doesn't necessarily mean you'll make the cover of a fitness magazine, but you'll sure look great at that summer wedding or barbeque, and you'll feel great about yourself.

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