



In this issue, Chinnor-based personal fitness trainer, Hilary Westall, puts some resistance training myths into context and explores why women really should lift weights as part of a fitness programme.

Weighing up weights for women

One of the most common fitness myths that persists amongst women is that resistance training (also called weight or strength training) will turn them into the Incredible Hulk.

Unless you are determined to look like Ms Universe by hitting the weights room with a vengeance, this 'bulking up' just won't happen. Testosterone is a very important factor in the development of muscle shape and, as women have very low levels of this hormone, their muscle development is different to that of men. What will happen is that you'll end up with a toned, stronger and firmer looking body which, in combination with cardiovascular exercise, will help you drop that dress size and achieve a leaner, more defined physique.

Benefits of resistance training:

- It helps to develop a stronger heart and stronger connective tissue.
- It speeds up metabolism and assists weight loss.
- It helps to protect against osteoporosis (more common in post-menopausal women) by increasing bone mass.
- It increases muscle tone.
- It increases range of movement (flexibility) and stabilises joints.

The expertise of a fitness instructor can really help with shaping your workout to fit your needs and body shape, and can advise you on the type of exercise, number of repetitions required, and number of sets to perform to achieve your goals. Proper technique with weights is crucial and a fitness instructor can monitor you carefully to minimise the risk of injury whilst maximising the benefits of resistance training. Without instruction, basic exercises are often performed in an incorrect or even dangerous fashion, which, over time, will not produce the desired results and can even be harmful.

"I've been using weights for a few weeks and I'm heavier than when I started – help!"

Don't be put off if your weight on the scales stays the same initially, or even increases slightly. Muscle weighs more per square inch than fat so try to be guided by how your clothes fit or, more accurately, by your total body fat percentage (which you will need to have measured by a qualified fitness instructor), to gauge progress. If your body fat is decreasing and your weight is stable then this is a sure sign that you are increasing your lean muscle mass. And for every pound of muscle you gain, your body burns around 50 extra calories per day.

If you want to lose weight, you will need to keep up your cardiovascular fitness to burn surplus fat and watch what you eat, as toned muscles won't show if they're covered by a layer of fat.

"I'm over 50 – surely I'm too old to be lifting weights at my age?"

Resistance work is an excellent way of combating many of the symptoms we may face as we get older and there really is no age limit. In fact adding a little muscle in the over 50's can be extremely beneficial for all the reasons given, reducing the risk of injury, improving balance, increasing flexibility and making older tendons and ligaments much more capable of withstanding stress.

Some Do's and Don'ts

- Do seek advice from a fitness professional if you are new to resistance training.
- Do aim for two to three resistance sessions per week and ensure your programme is progressive and varied to keep challenging your body.
- Do use a suitable weight so that the last repetition feels like hard work – you have to challenge your muscles to get stronger.



- Don't overdo it – leave a day or two to recover between sessions. Muscles grow while resting so pushing yourself too hard won't do you any favours.
- Don't expect results to be immediate – build up slowly and expect to notice the difference within a few weeks.

Resistance training takes many forms – body weight, dumbbells, barbells, weights machines and stretch bands can all be used effectively. With a little effort you can reap big rewards, helping you to feel and look healthier - the benefits really are worth it and can last a lifetime.

Hilary can be contacted on **07812 097562**, email: hilarywestall@googlemail.com or visit www.hilarypersonaltrainer.co.uk.

She is starting a group body conditioning class in the Reading Rooms in Chinnor High Street on Friday 12th September from 10-11am. You can contact her for further details.



COMPETITION

Win a FREE one-to-one workout. See page 50