

The role of muscle in healthy aging

In the past, health experts paid a lot of attention to heart health and its role in longer life. Aerobic fitness improves heart health, and that is still very important. But more and more research is telling us how important muscle strength is to healthy aging.

We have known for a long time that stronger muscles help reduce falls and maintain physical function. Now, a research review shows that 30 to 60 minutes a week of muscle training has many other benefits. It reduces the risk of death from all causes, including cardiovascular disease, some types of cancer, and diabetes.¹

Why is strength training important as we age?

As we get older, there is a progressive decline in muscle mass. That leads to a loss of strength and function. The term for this is 'sarcopenia'. Sarcopenia increases the risk of poor health outcomes, including falls, loss of independence, disability, and death from all causes.²

What is the best way to increase muscle mass?

Researchers have been looking for the most effective ways to treat sarcopenia. They have found that there are two key factors:

- 👍 overall physical activity
- 👍 nutritional supplements (especially protein)

Researchers found that a well-rounded exercise program, including both strength and aerobic exercise, was the most effective intervention to treat loss of muscle mass.³

Some general guidance on strength training

Develop a muscle training routine you can do two or three times a week. Exercise all the major muscle groups in both the upper and lower body.⁴

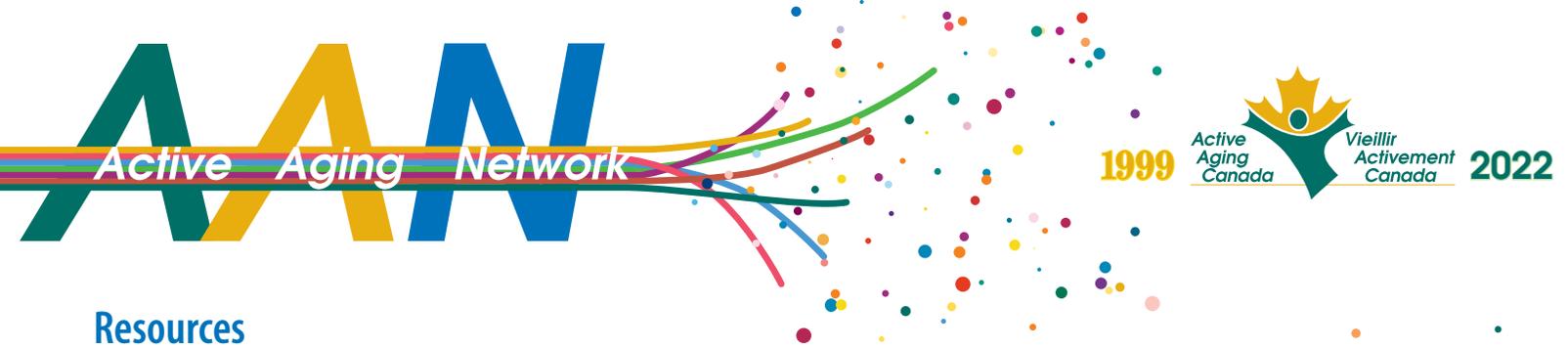
Building muscle requires a little effort. Pick a weight that you can lift, pull, or push. Do the exercise 8 to 10 times in a row. This is called repetitions.

Start with doing the repetitions for each exercise (a set) once or twice. Wait a few minutes between each set of repetitions.

When it starts getting easier, try more repetitions, more sets, or a heavier weight.

I have never done strength training. Where do I get help?

Join a class or find a personal trainer who has expertise working with older adults. This is a great investment for strong muscles and good health! And check out the resources below.



Resources

If you are just beginning and want to learn easy-to-do exercises at home, have a look at these videos from the National Institute of Aging (<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/exercise-physical-activity>) for upper (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUYxcRvdal8&list=PLmk21KJuZUM4HTrJ7hrJ8yxhToKkJT8a8&index=6>) and lower body (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOKxtgKrGCQ&list=PLmk21KJuZUM4HTrJ7hrJ8yxhToKkJT8a8&index=5>) exercises. (English only)

Check out our Active Aging Living Tip – The Power of Strength Training for Older Adults (<https://www.activeagingcanada.ca/assets/pdf/active-living-tip-sheets/Strength-Training-For-Older-Adults.pdf>).

To learn about how protein can maximize your strength training workout, see our Active Aging Network article (<https://www.activeagingcanada.ca/newsletter/active-aging-network/v01-issue004-2021-04-Maximize-your-Strength-Training-Workouts-with-Protein.htm>).

References

1. Momma et al. *Muscle-strengthening activities are associated with lower risk and mortality in major non-communicable diseases: a systematic review and meta-analysis of cohort studies*. British Journal of Sports Medicine Published Online First: 28 February 2022. Doi: 10.1136/bjsports-2021-105061
2. Landi et al., *Sarcopenia: An Overview on Current Definitions, Diagnosis and Treatment*. Curr Protein Pept Sci. 2018 May 14;19(7):633-638. doi: 10.2174/1389203718666170607113459.
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4. Rodrigues F, Domingos C, Monteiro D, Morouço P. *A Review on Aging, Sarcopenia, Falls, and Resistance Training in Community-Dwelling Older Adults*. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2022 Jan 13;19(2):874. doi: 10.3390/ijerph19020874. PMID: 35055695; PMCID: PMC8775372.