

NorCal Feds FitTip: A well-rounded Fitness Program (Part 2)

My last FitTip discussed one of the key components to a well-rounded program, Cardiovascular Endurance. This article will focus on Muscular Strength.

The content of FitTips is for informational purposes only. This information is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice. You should always seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health provider before beginning any exercise program or weight loss program.

Muscular Strength is the maximum amount of force a muscle or muscle group can develop during a single contraction.

So – let's cut to the chase, why does this matter?

In short - Lean muscle mass decreases with age. If you don't do anything to replace the muscle loss, it will be replaced with fat. Weight training can help you reverse the trend — at any age. As your muscle mass increases, you'll be able to work harder and longer before you get tired.

Strength Training Helps:

- Develop strong bones. By stressing your bones, strength training increases bone density and reduces the risk of osteoporosis.
- Control your weight. Muscles burn more calories than fat — which can result in weight loss.
- Reduce your risk of injury. Building muscle protects your joints from injury. It also helps you maintain flexibility and balance — and remain independent as you age.
- Boost your stamina. As you grow stronger, you won't fatigue as easily.
- Improve your sense of well-being. Strength training can boost your self-confidence, improve your body image and reduce the risk of depression.
- Manage chronic conditions. Strength training can reduce the signs and symptoms of many chronic conditions, including arthritis, back pain, depression, diabetes, obesity and osteoporosis.

How does one start a strength training program?

For beginners it may be helpful to seek out a personal trainer to get you started and teach you how to use the various apparatuses. Most gyms offer this service. If you don't belong to a gym, there are many resources on-line that provide detailed instruction for well-rounded strength training with minimal equipment. A couple that come to mind are: www.livestrong.com and the [mayo clinic](http://www.mayoclinic.com).

For the more experienced it may be a matter of just setting up a program around what you already know. If it's been a while, then you may want to refer to the web sites listed above for some tips and motivation.

Whatever your situation – I offer the following advice:

- **Learn proper technique.** Proper technique is essential and is more important than the amount of weight.
- **Start slowly.** If you're a beginner or have been away for a while, you may find that you're able to lift only a few pounds. That's OK. Once your body gets used to weight training exercises, you may be surprised at how quickly you progress. Once you can easily do 12 repetitions with a particular weight, gradually increase the weight.
- **Take time to rest.** To give your muscles time to recover, rest one full day between exercising each specific muscle group. You might choose to work the major muscle groups at a single session two or three times a week — or plan daily sessions for specific muscle groups.
- **You don't have to belong to a gym.** There are plenty of strength training exercises that require little to no equipment and that can be done in the comfort of your own home. In following FitTips I will provide some specific examples of great workouts for the gym, at home or while on travel.

Sources:

American Council on Exercise, Personal Trainer Manual

[Mayo Clinic](http://www.mayoclinic.com)

www.livestrong.com

Stay Fit for Life!