

WEIGHTS FOR RESULTS

>> When putting on weight's good for you – and how to sculpt without bulk...

6 REASONS TO WEIGHT-TRAIN

1 It burns calories even when you aren't doing it! Recent research in *The Journal Of Strength And Conditioning Research* compared energy expenditure on a day when women resistance-trained with a day when they did not. Twenty-four-hour energy expenditure on the training day was, on average, 327 calories greater and the peak occurred predominantly during the training and in the 30 minutes following it.

2 It helps you fit your clothes better Weight-training helps you gain more muscle, which, in turn, gives you a trimmer silhouette, according to Miriam Nelson, a scientist at Tufts University, US, and author of *Strong Women Stay Slim* (available via the internet). This is because a pound of muscle is less bulky than a pound of fat – so the more muscle you gain, and the more fat you shed, the trimmer you'll look. While resistance-training makes the fibres within your muscles bigger, this serves to make the overall muscle denser rather than bulkier.

3 It helps you shed dangerous tummy fat A study published in *Medicine And Science In Sports And Exercise* found that a full-body resistance-training routine had a great effect on 'heart unfriendly' intra-abdominal adipose tissue (the fat around your abdominal organs) and on subcutaneous adipose tissue (fat under your skin) in the tummy area. The fat around your abdomen is more metabolically active than that which gathers around your hips and thighs, so it is easier to shift as a result of exercise.

4 It fights off age-related declines in metabolism and lean mass! 'Being stronger, with larger muscles, delays some of the natural ageing processes in your body, such as muscle loss, bone loss, decreased metabolic rate and decreased energy and activity levels,' says Lori Incledon, author of *Strength Training For Women* (available via the internet).

5 It improves your sporting prowess This is particularly the case if you are new to an activity. A study from the University Of Maryland, US, found that 12 weeks of strength-training boosted cycling performance by 33% in novice bikers. Muscles and connective tissues (tendons and ligaments) are also less likely to strain or tear when they are robust.

6 It preserves your bones And, unlike walking or running, where you're predominantly working your lower body, it involves all the joints. 'Resistance-training increases bone mineral density in pre- and post-menopausal and elderly women, reducing the risk of osteoporosis,' says Incledon.



Will I bulk up if I use heavy weights?

Personal trainer Jeff Archer says 'Men have 20 to 30 times more testosterone – the hormone responsible for increasing muscle size – than women, so weight-training, even with heavy weights, is not going to make you look masculine. Use weights that allow you to complete sets of 15 to 20 reps max – high intensity brings fast results.'

4 WAYS TO MAKE WEIGHTS WORK HARDER

1 Go for multi-muscle moves

'Compound moves, in which more than one muscle is worked, give you a bigger bang for your buck,' says Jeff Archer, director of The Tonic personal-training company (www.the-tonic.com). 'Compound exercises also tend to be more practical than isolation exercises (that just pinpoint one muscle or set of muscles), which means they promote better use of the body in everyday life.'

Try these smart swaps...

- Do lunges instead of leg extensions.
- Do push-ups instead of tricep extensions or chest flies.
- Do a seated row instead of bicep curls.
- Do squats instead of hamstring curls.

2 Think big

'Work large muscles and muscle groups first,' says Inledon. 'They demand much more energy and should be worked before fatigue sets in.' A recent study from Brazil found that whatever order muscles are worked in, the final exercises in a workout tend to be the poorest – so don't let those big, calorie-hungry muscles off the hook by saving them till last!

3 More sets, please!

'You absolutely need to do more than one set,' says Inledon. A recent overview of the existing research supports her view. It concluded that, while one-set training is not a waste of time, multiple-set (usually three) training offers additional benefits, including greater strength gains and increased muscle mass. But don't forget to rest between sets – in a study from Goethe University, Germany, of novice female exercisers, a rest interval of two minutes between sets produced significant strength gains.

4 Ring the changes

'Varying the reps, sets or speed of movement helps keep your body and brain challenged and encourages steady progress,' says Archer. 'Different exercises also stimulate different muscle regions or the same region from a different angle, so it's a good idea to expand your repertoire.' Inledon recommends sticking to a weight-training routine for four to six weeks, then changing one variable in your programme – such as the number of reps or sets you do or the order in which you do the exercises. □



TOP KIT

Dumb-bells

The best bargain around is the V-Fit trio of dumb-bells (Argos, £13.95; available for home delivery from www.argos.co.uk). Two at 1.5kg, two at 3kg and two at 5kg give a beginner plenty of scope.

Resistance tubes

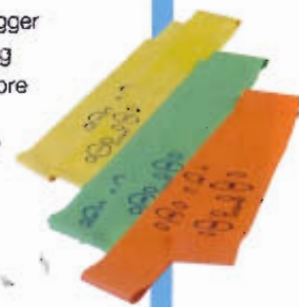
Digibands (from £7.65, available from Proactive Health: 0870 848482 or www.proactive-health.co.uk). The Digiband has little oval-shaped icons printed on them – when you stretch the band enough to make the oval turn into a circle, you are working at the resistance stated, such as 1kg.

Home gym

Bowflex Sport (£799, Bowflex; 0800 0131606 or visit www.bowflex.co.uk). It may be pricey, but this lightweight, portable home-gym system, based on rods and pulleys, claims to transform your body in six weeks! It allows you to perform over 60 exercises and has already sold over 1.5 million in the US! Now it's set to make its mark in the UK.

Footwear

Taos Sandals (£74.99, Keen, 0800 6129292). A sandal-trainer that offers support for directional movement.



celebrity weights fans...

- Supermodel **Heidi Klum** used weights to get back in shape after the birth of her daughter. But even she finds it tough. 'If I could pay someone to go to the gym for me, I would,' she says.
- Hard to believe that Hollywood actress **Kim Basinger** is over 50 when she looks so good – but she's an avid exerciser. 'If you want to lose a few pounds, you have to fight it with weights,' she says.
- **Davina McCall** used weights as part of her post-baby shape-up campaign, going out jogging holding a pair of dumb-bells.

