

When Lifting Gets Harder with Age



If lifting seems harder as you grow older, it is not that the things you are lifting are heavier. Your aging body may be at fault. Even healthy people typically lose a little muscle strength each year, a result of the normal effects of aging, less physical activity or both.

Studies have shown that the loss of strength starts at about age 55, with muscle strength diminishing by 15% per decade after 50. A

marked decline in the testosterone and growth hormone after about age 60 causes strength levels to fall more rapidly, independent of training. The reduction of these hormones shifts the balance between muscle protein synthesis (anabolism) and protein breakdown (catabolism). The resulting decreased strength is due to atrophy of muscle fibers. After 70 years of age, the rate of decline in muscle strength climbs to 30%. Often the result of lower activity levels, this loss of strength makes us more vulnerable to falls and overall loss of mobility.

The good news is that there is ample evidence that exercise—strength or resistance training, in particular—can slow this decline. When you push against great resistance, the burning feeling you experience is a sign of muscle damage. When the muscle heals from that damage, it is stronger than before. One study even found that **strength training may actually reverse the aging process at the molecular level of muscles**. And, say experts, you are never too old to start exercising. Even frail elders in their 90s have gained tremendous ground in muscle size and strength through appropriate exercise programs. A balanced program also includes aerobic activities and exercises to enhance balance and increase endurance and flexibility.

We can help you put together a realistic individualized exercise program and set short- and long-term goals. Through exercise, you can become more active, stay independent and carry out everyday activities, such as climbing stairs and carrying groceries.