



Strength and Motivation

Everyone knows exercise is an important component of weight loss, but what type of exercise will provide the best results? Most people believe cardio should be the primary focus over strength training. But is this correct?

During weight loss, we want to lose fat, not muscle. When we lose muscle, our metabolism slows, which can make it difficult to stay at a healthy weight. Strength training helps us maintain our muscle.

Additional benefits include:

- Improvement in the tone and shape of the body
- Easier to perform everyday activities, such as carrying groceries, lifting kids, working outside, and simply getting out of chairs.
- Improvement in balance and helps improve bone density
- Improves grip strength
- Increases longevity
- Helps with back pain

Many people worry that lifting weights will slow their weight loss or that they'll become "bulky." Yes, muscle weighs more than fat, but muscle also burns more calories. Strength training will not slow your weight loss, and you will not become a big, bulky bodybuilder. The goal is to maintain the muscle you have as you're losing weight.

There are many types of strength training to choose from. You could choose to use weight machines in the gym, buy dumbbells for home, engage in bodyweight exercises, or use resistance bands or kettle bells. It can be as simple as a 15-minute workout at home or a trip to the gym for a 60-minute full body workout—whatever fits your schedule.



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For weight loss patients, regardless of age, starting weight, or fitness level, strength training should be a top priority. But do you know how to get started? The ultimate goal is to do some form of strength training 2 or 3 times per week. You can work your whole body each session or choose different body parts on different days. Make sure to include all the major muscle groups: chest, shoulders, back, abdominals, hips, and legs. Try doing 3 sets of 8-12 repetitions for each exercise. Most people ask, “When do I increase weight?” Weight can be increased once you’re at your goal of sets and repetitions. Lifting heavier weights will not cause you to “bulk up,” but will help you retain as much muscle as possible. Remember, you are trying to maintain muscle and strength, not build a lot of muscle during the weight loss stage.

When building a strength training routine, you want to have balance in what you are doing. If you are pushing, you need to be pulling. For example, if you are doing push-ups, you need to be doing pull-ups. If you are doing leg extensions, you need to do leg curls. Whether in the same session or in separate sessions throughout the week, you’ll want to work all the major muscle groups. You could have an upper body day and a lower body day. You can split it down even further into a chest/triceps day and a back/biceps day. You can design your own program, find one online, in a book, or work with a personal trainer.

Here's a look at the importance of strength training as it relates to weight loss. Imagine two groups of people. They both follow the exact same diet every single day for 12 weeks. One group engages in cardio only. The other group engages in strength training only. After 12 weeks, they should see the same overall weight loss. But who’s more likely to maintain their weight loss? The strength training group! Why? Because they have retained more muscle and likely have a higher resting metabolism (which burns more calories) than the cardio-only group.

The benefits of strength training are absolutely worth the time and effort you put into it. If you are concerned about hurting yourself, start slow and light, learn proper form, and progress from there. Your body will look and feel better, and you’re more likely to maintain weight loss by maintaining muscle.