



Zoe Birch is a Chartered Physiotherapist and founder of PhysioMotion, which operate a clinic at Green Park as well as providing physiotherapy at home. In her latest article Zoe explores how and why women should try to improve their strength.

WHY STRONG IS THE NEW BEAUTIFUL!

For decades women have been told that they need to be beautiful, but this has meant to present ourselves as thin, elegant and fragile. Now we have a new generation of thinking and it is that strong and powerful is the new beautiful.

Why is it so important that all generations of women move towards this narrative?

Resistance training does not just have benefits of looking good. Here are other reasons to pick up your dumbbells and start jumping around the house:

MANAGING THE MENOPAUSE

During perimenopause and menopause it is really important to weight train in order to:

1. Stimulate muscle building stem cells as your oestrogen levels reduce
2. Increase bone density as bones can lose up to 10% of their mass in the five years following menopause.
3. Reduce hot flushes- this is still being researched but resistance training releases endorphins that are thought to help the body with its thermoregulation.



IMPROVING BONE HEALTH

As I often hear on the gym floor, if you do not use you will lose it. If you do not apply stress to your skeleton, it is not stimulated to lay down new bone to replace old bone. Over a period of time, this can result in the bone having reduced density and being diagnosed with osteoporosis.

By applying stress to your body through weight and plyometric training, you are sending messages to your brain that your body needs new bone provided to these areas.

REDUCING RISK OF FALLS

The biggest risk factor associated with falling is muscle weakness, as you are unable to control your movements as well. By particularly strengthening your legs, you are improving your movement control, proprioception and balance.

MANAGING YOUR WEIGHT

Running and cycling overall will burn more calories in the moment, but the benefits of resistance training will assist with increased energy consumption by increasing your muscle mass. Muscles need energy to be used- More muscle = more calories being burnt.

REDUCING RISK OF CHRONIC CONDITIONS

Resistance training can help protect you from chronic inflammation, diabetes, heart disease and cancer. It does this by:

1. Reducing blood sugar by improving the efficiency of the body to store blood sugars resulting in less sugar being in your blood.
2. Lowering your blood pressure as increased muscle mass requires more blood vessels for blood to flow through the body resulting in less pressure on your heart.
3. Discouraging chronic inflammation by reducing certain fat cells that send out messages to your body that increase inflammation.

REDUCING COGNITIVE DECLINE

With the population living longer, we all want to maintain being cognitively sharp and resistance training can assist with this by reducing homocysteine levels that are associated with impairing cognitive performance and Alzheimer's disease. Exercising reduces plaques forming in the brain and protecting the brain's structure such as the hippocampus - its main role of which is learning and memory.

IMPROVING JOINT HEALTH

As a physiotherapist I am often prescribing strengthening programmes to my patients with jointpain and this is because increasing the muscle strength around the joints helps support them and reduce direct stress being put through them.

Also whilst performing these exercises, you are moving your joints and stimulating them to stay healthy within the joint capsule and articulating bones.

IMPROVING SLEEP

Resistance training stimulates a growth in muscles cells that boosts levels of testosterone and growth hormone in your body. These hormones have been linked to a better and deeper sleep.

Other processes that happen during resistance training to impact your sleep positively are:

- Reduction in stress and anxiety resulting in you being able to fall and stay asleep.
- The need for muscle repair sending messages to the brain to make you sleep more deeply.
- Production of adenosine that causes drowsiness.

IMPROVING PELVIC FLOOR HEALTH

By engaging your pelvic floor muscles during weight training, this can help challenge them further and either improve or prevent pelvic organ prolapse and urinary incontinence.

IMPROVING MOOD

We all know the euphoria feeling after you've performed exercise due to a release of endorphins, but resistance training can boost your confidence and self-esteem as you look better, you are achieving goals in your training and you have an increased sense of control.

If you think performing resistance training will make you end up looking like a body builder, this is only possible if you are training daily at maximal weight capacity and following a strict diet.

Resistance training can be performed anywhere and is not restricted to the sweaty gyms with intimidating men.

Why not start your training journey with your local physiotherapy to identify areas of weakness and gain confidence in what you can perform. Then you could continue the exercises in your home, the park or a gym.

But whatever you do enjoy the benefits of being a strong beautiful woman!

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