



Resistance Training: What is it?

by Penny Porter



Aerobic exercise has been widely prescribed and used as a means of weight control and fat loss, with most health authorities promoting at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise, every day of the week.

However, a form of exercise that is often overlooked by people trying to control their weight is 'resistance' training. This article will explain what resistance exercises are, why they are important for health, and their role in helping you to control your weight and lead a healthy lifestyle.

What is resistance training?

Strengthening or resistance exercises involve pushing, pulling or lifting against resistance.

Examples include:

- Lifting weights
- Callisthenics (sit-ups and press-ups)
- Using resistance bands
- Climbing the stairs
- Carrying the shopping
- Heavy garden work – digging and pushing a wheelbarrow

What are the health benefits associated with resistance exercise?

When performed regularly, resistance training can lead to:

- decreased risk of osteoporosis, by positively affecting bone mineral density
- improved posture and balance
- improved muscle strength and tone, which in turn can improve body shape
- a reduction in high blood pressure
- increased metabolic rate, which helps to maintain body weight

After the age of 30, on average we lose 5lbs of muscle each decade; resistance exercises can help to prevent this decrease.

Will I get big and bulky and look masculine if I lift weights?

No! A common misconception amongst female dieters is that if they start to do resistance exercises, they will become 'masculine' and big and bulky. However, this is not true!

It is a simple fact that women do not and cannot naturally produce as much testosterone (one of the hormones responsible for an increase in muscle growth) as men do. Many female body builders take anabolic steroids (synthetic testosterone), along with many other drugs, to increase their muscle size. They also spend many hours in the gym each week, lifting very heavy weights.

Can I turn fat into muscle?

Again the simple answer is no!

You can gain muscle (fat-free mass) through resistance exercise, and you can lose fat through diet and exercise simultaneously. However, muscle and fat are very different types of tissue, and one cannot be turned into the other.

How do I get stronger?

Resistance training works by causing microscopic damage or tears in the muscle cells, which in turn are repaired quickly by the body through a process of growth and regeneration. Muscles, therefore, become stronger, meaning you can gradually start to increase the resistance.

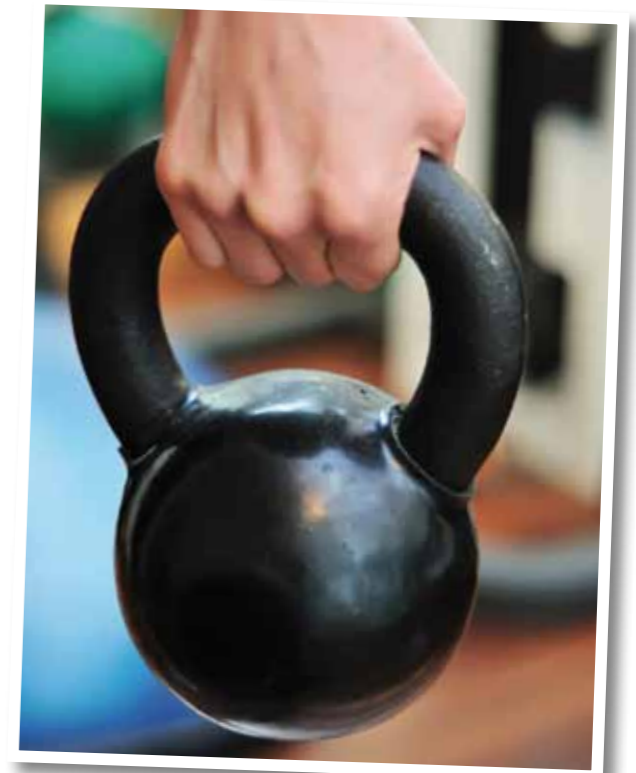
How do I start?

Depending on your current condition, you may not want to use any weights at all. As with all exercises, start off slowly and gradually build up as you get fitter and stronger. If you do too much too soon, you risk suffering from muscle soreness, fatigue and injury.

When starting a programme, try to exercise all the major muscle groups. As a guide, select a weight which you can lift at least ten times — if you can't lift it eight times, it is too heavy; if you can easily do 15 repetitions, it is too light. Initially, try to complete 12–15 repetitions of each exercise. As you get stronger, gradually increase the weight that you are lifting or try to complete two sets of each exercise.

How often should I do resistance exercises?

To allow for growth and repair, resistance exercises on the same muscle groups should be performed two or three times a week, allowing 48 hours between sessions for recovery to occur.



KETTLEBELLS: Give a great resistance workout. They burn fat, build cardio fitness and help to improve strength.

Do I need to go to a gym to do resistance exercises?

No! Although dumbbells are ideal for exercising in the home, they are not vital. Using your own body weight and household items (such as cans of food, bottles of water and hardback books) can provide resistance when performing strength training exercises.

Resistance bands are also great to use at home. They come in a variety of resistance levels, are inexpensive, can be easily stored, are very versatile and can even be taken with you on holiday.

Will I put weight on if I do resistance exercises?

Any form of physical activity will burn calories, thus helping you to control and possibly lose weight. If you use enough resistance, when doing strength workouts, you will gain muscle mass, which is heavier than fat. However, muscle takes up less space than fat, so whilst your body composition is improving (i.e. your body fat percentage is decreasing) your body weight may stay the same or even increase slightly.

Therefore, it is wise to not only take scale measurements, but to also have your body fat measurements tested regularly, and to take size measurements from different areas of the body, as you will find that you are losing inches rather than pounds.

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