

Strong Women Still Stay Slim

From [Paul Rogers](#),

Why Women Should Train With Weights

While weight training has traditionally been a male activity, over the last twenty years women have taken to the weight rooms of gyms and health clubs, and to their own spare rooms at home, with increasing enthusiasm. The [benefits of strength training](#) for women should not be underestimated. Although large muscles tend not to be one of the acquisitions women get from weight training, increased strength, balance and bone density are.

Women Don't Get Huge Muscles From Weights

Strong Women Stay Slim was a best selling book for Miriam Nelson because she was one of the first authorities to make weight training a contemporary issue for women with promises of fat loss, strength increases and bone density benefits as a buffer against the onset of osteoporosis and other age and lifestyle related afflictions.

For men, these issues are somewhat different because men are protected to some extent by the male sex hormone testosterone which tends to enhance muscle and bone growth.

Yet even men suffer from age-related osteoporosis and loss of muscle. Exercise, including strength training, is one solution.

Even though women produce testosterone -- it's important for female sex drive -- they don't produce as much as men, and that's why women don't grow big muscles under weight training stimulation or at any other time. Yet strength improvements and the stimulation of bone growth through weight training is not necessarily a product of muscle size -- one reason why weight training still works for women, and can work for you, even though huge muscles won't happen unless you take steroids. You can relax about that aspect.

Physical Activity, Weights, Protect Against Breast Cancer

One of the main risk factors for breast cancer is obesity. The American Cancer Society reported this in its January 2007 report. The report also found that physical activity protects against breast cancer and perhaps also the return of cancer after treatment. It's easy to see that slimming down with a diet and exercise program, including weights, could reduce your risk of breast cancer, notwithstanding inherited family risk. In fact, if you do have breast cancer in the immediate family, an exercise program may be one thing you can do to reduce *your* risk.

In addition, women diagnosed with breast cancer and undergoing treatment are being advised to take up weight training. Some studies show an improved quality of life with no adverse effects. An all-round exercise program may substantially reduce your risk of breast cancer re-appearing. This is what the American Cancer Society had to say:

3,000 breast cancer survivors in the Nurses' Health Study showed that higher levels of post-treatment physical activity were associated with a 26% to 40% reduction in the risk of breast cancer recurrence, breast cancer-specific mortality, and all-cause mortality. The risk reduction was seen with as little as 1 to 3 hours per week of moderate intensity activity with further reductions for those performing 3 to 5 hours per week.

Weight Training at Menopause

Many women understand that they are somewhat protected from various afflictions like heart disease and osteoporosis by a plentiful supply of estrogen until menopause. With the waning of this female hormone, cholesterol readings may get worse, bone density can decline and weight can start to rise. If you have never been physically active or have been inactive for some years, this is a good time to start exercise in general and weight training in particular. Exercise improves the health of women in a number of ways at or around menopause. This is what a scientific review found of the benefits of a combined aerobic and resistance training program for women at that time. (Sports Med. 2004;34(11):753-78.)

The training described is likely to preserve normal bodyweight, or combined with a weight-reducing diet, preserve BMD (bone mineral density) and increase muscle strength. Based on limited evidence, such exercise might also improve flexibility, balance and coordination, decrease hypertension (blood pressure) and improve dyslipidaemia (blood fats).

You don't have to be concerned that you may be required to start running marathons or become a bodybuilder either. Regular walking combined with a well-designed strength training program at home can bring good results according to this review study. It's also worth noting that although additional effort usually results in greater benefit, starting out with a modest program is the key to success. The bottom line is: do what you can do, but just do it.

References

Kushi LH, Byers T, Doyle C, Bandera EV. American Cancer Society Guidelines on Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention. *CA Cancer J Clin* 2006; 56:254-281.