

Weight Training 101

By Kent Pegg

Are you considering starting a weight-training program for the first time? If so, congratulations! Resistance exercise using weights as been shown to have numerous health benefits.

Whether you're trying to rehab an injury, build your bone density, lose weight, or increase your functional strength or joint strength, weight training should be an essential component of your exercise routine.

If you're just starting out, consider checking with your physician, especially if you have any medical concerns, and then get started.

You'll want to start slow. Begin by performing one or two exercises for each body part and start with two sets of twelve repetitions for each exercise.

Once you've gotten the feel for the different exercises for various body parts, and after developing some joint strength to help reduce the risk of injury, begin to increase your intensity and exercise volume.

It will help to split your workout routines to allow you to focus on certain body parts for each workout. Depending on your goals and workout frequency, you can split your body parts into 2, 3, 4, or any number of different workouts.

If you're looking for muscle endurance, perform each exercise for 12 to 15 repetitions per set. If it's muscle strength or size you're looking for, shoot for 8 to 12 reps per set. Anywhere from 2 to 4 sets of each exercise should work. Try to keep your weight training sessions to about 40 to 60 minutes per session.

Now that you have an idea of what your workout volume should be, let's talk about what exercises you should perform.

A good weight-training program should include exercises for all major muscle groups: back, chest, shoulders, biceps, triceps, abs and legs.

For your back, perform scapular retraction exercises like rows. Any rowing exercise develops the muscles between the shoulder blades and helps improve your posture.

Also for your back, do pulldowns or machine assisted pull-ups to develop scapular depression strength in your lats. Finally, make sure you exercise your lower back. Back hyperextensions performed on a 45-degree bench with little or no weights can go a long way toward preventing lower back injuries.

To work out you chest, execute both incline bench and flat bench presses. These can be done with dumbbells, barbells, smith machines, or plate loaded equipment like Hammer Strength machines. Always begin light and make sure you're well warmed up to prevent shoulder injuries. Cable crosses and machine flyes are also good exercises for your chest.

When exercising your shoulders, be careful with shoulder presses. Many people have some problems with their shoulders that make shoulder presses more difficult. Begin with little weight and increase gradually, paying close attention to your form.

For your biceps, perform both supinated (palm up) curls and neutral grip (palm facing) curls. With your palms up, more emphasis is placed on both heads of the biceps while with your palms facing you place more emphasis on the outer head of the biceps and the forearm. Use barbells, dumbbells, or cable machines for these exercises.

Your triceps can be exercised by doing pressdowns, kickbacks or overhead extensions. Dumbbells and cables work best for triceps. Try changing your hand position anywhere from palm down to palm facing to emphasize different areas of your triceps.

A beginning abdominal workout should contain single or double leg lifts, crunches, and oblique crunches. Only a small range of motion is necessary and take care not to irritate your lower back, especially if you have a history of back problems. Also, abs can take higher volume training so increase your reps to as many as feel comfortable.

Finally, you'll need several exercises for your legs. Compound exercises like squats, leg presses, and lunges should come at the beginning of your leg workout. These exercises work several different leg muscles at once and need to be done when you have the most energy.

Finish your leg workout by doing isolation exercises like extensions for your quads, curls for your hamstrings, adductors for your inner thighs and calf raises for your calves.

If you're unsure how to perform any of these exercises or if you need further program design, help is available. Seek out a trained and certified fitness professional that has worked in the field for several years to make sure you get the right advice.

Don't fear your new adventure into weight training. Today's exercise equipment and information makes it much easier to make progress than the old "no pain, no gain" days. Before you know it you'll feel like an old pro in the gym.

Kent Pegg is a certified personal trainer and the co-owner of the Los Alamos Fitness Center. If you have any questions about the information or exercises in this article you can call him at 662-5232.