

By ~~May 2008~~ Gaza, Life & Style Editor

## The Secrets of Strength Training

*Strength training should be an important part of any and all fitness regimes*

For a long time, women have dismissed strength training and labeled it a "guy thing". You know the cliché - a steamy room at the gym filled with heavy, complicated and diabolic-looking machinery, guys wearing little more than short shorts and sweaty tank tops, measuring the size of each other's muscles and showing off their lifting and pulling abilities. Apparently, this rather silly image has made the rest of us healthy living fans miss out on a basic element of health and fitness. Experts say that if we don't balance aerobic with the correct amount of strength training, our workouts are not by far as effective as they ought to be. Fitness experts at the Mayo Clinic tell us that with a little help from a regular strength training program "you can reduce your body fat, increase your lean muscle mass and burn calories more efficiently". Which all sounds very well, wouldn't you say? Below is a short overview of the basic things we really need to know regarding strength training - why you should decide to do it, its benefits, some simple, cheap solutions to get started and the results we can expect. **Why consider strength training?**When it comes to muscle mass, there's only one (also rather cliché) catch phrase you need to remember: use it or lose it. Unfortunately, it really is that simple. The longer you wait before embarking even on a minimal strength training and fitness routine, the more you expose yourself to the risks brought about by decreased muscle mass. Muscle mass diminishes with age, decreased muscle mass can affect your mobility and worst of all, it can damage your self-esteem and independence. Why? Because decreased muscle mass very often causes your metabolism to slow down and brings about an increase in your fat storage. There is also a higher risk of developing osteoporosis. **What does it do for me?**The most important benefit of strength training is the fact that it preserves and enhances muscle mass (see above). There are, of course, other wonderful benefits, among which: \* **Stronger bones.** Strength training increases bone density and reduces the risk of osteoporosis. \* **Lower risk of injury.** Building muscle acts like a natural cushion around your joints, protecting them from injury. It also helps you keep flexibility and balance as you age and preserve your independence. \* **Less fatigue and more stamina.** \* **Improve your self confidence.** Strength training can easily improve your body image, boost your self-confidence and make it easier to lose weight. It also decreases the risk of clinical depression. \* **Sleep better.** People who practice strength training are less prone to develop insomnia. **How do I get started?**First of all, it's important to consult your doctor and get his permission to begin a strength training program. It's essential to start small. Don't over-exert yourself. Always perform a warm-up, start with five to ten minutes of light stretching or gentle aerobic activity - brisk walking is a good choice, for example. Then experts say it's best to choose a weight or resistance level that's difficult enough to tire your muscles after about 12 repetitions. "On the 12th repetition, you should be just barely able to finish the motion", advises Edward Laskowski, M.D., a physical medicine and rehabilitation specialist at the Mayo Clinic. "When you're using the proper weight or amount of resistance, you can build muscle just as efficiently with a single set of 12 repetitions as you can with more sets of the same exercise". Give your muscles time to rest and recover. Rest one full day in between working various, specific muscle groups. When you no longer feel tired after doing 12 or more repetitions of one specific exercise, it's time to increase the weight or resistance. Stop if you feel pain. It's OK to feel slightly sore but any sharp pain or swelling in the joint region is a clear sign that you're trying too hard. Your strength and stamina will visibly improve after two to three weeks. You'll feel less fatigue, more energy and a sense of physical and emotional wellbeing.