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Strength Training, Little Kids & Broccoli

As time goes by, the notion that **strength training** can help improve health, longevity, and general well-being becomes more accepted. According to the staff at Mayo Clinic¹, it can help preserve and enhance muscle mass, reduce bodyfat, and manage chronic conditions. The sources supporting strength training are many and grow in number daily.

The real question is how to get people to actually do it.

In too many cases, those who want to try strength training never learn how it should feel when done correctly. The role nutrition plays is rarely explained, and the only cardio training shown is either slowly walking on a treadmill or a slow pedal on an elliptical bike.

In too many cases, their experience with fitness is a thin gruel with little flavor and even less nutritional value.

A little kid would call it yucky. And he'd be right.

Where Do Strength Trainers Come From?

For many long-term gym members, their experience working out started in high school and they never stopped when school and the sport ended. It became a part of their lives at an early age and they simply never stopped. Watching people start at the gym in January and quit in March leaves these “veterans” shaking their heads.

For them, working out is an addiction they don't want to kick. Or need to. The question is how to spread this healthy addiction among the masses of people who could really use its benefits in their lives.



Strength Training Builds Envious Physiques!

¹ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/strength-training/art-20046670>

The “B-Word”

Many who’ve continued to work out for years use routines that were developed to prepare for physique competitions. They see what worked for the girl or guy in a magazine and want to try it themselves. What they are doing is usually a form of bodybuilding, but this word itself is part of the larger problem.

For many people, it brings to mind images of heavily-tanned competitors in contest shape wearing posing suits and looking like cartoon characters. They find those images intimidating, unattractive, and don’t want any part of it.

One side effect of this revulsion can be an actual fear of what the training might do to them. They think using more weight than an 80 year old woman might will turn them into a Schwarzenegger by next week. Experienced trainers laugh at the notion and say, “fat chance.”

But the fear is there, and it’s hard to dispel.

Hence the “B word,” and the need to avoid it around new people.

The “B-Word” and Why to Avoid Using It

At this point, the real question becomes how to get the person who needs what bodybuilding can do for them to start putting in the kind of work that gets results. This challenge reminds us of a parent who wants to get their child to eat the vegetables they know will be good for them.

The parent puts veggies on the plate with the protein and carbs, the child instinctively resists, and the battle commences...

While the tactical details of children and veggies are better left to experienced parents, what follows are some ideas on new people and strength training that should do the trick. The truth of the matter is that no approach to this subject is fool-proof. Those who don’t want to put in work won’t get results. It’s as simple as that, but failure isn’t unavoidable either.

The key is to introduce the person to their own body, how their muscles should feel when working out, and the part solid nutrition plays in the outcome they get. Once exposed to the building blocks of strength training and the “B word,” the person is free to use as much or as little of the information as they wish.

You would no more explain a bodybuilder’s pre-contest routine to a new person than a piano teacher would explain one of Mozart’s sonatas to a 1st day piano student. They aren’t ready for it, and it would likely scare them off.

So where to begin?

Step 1: Learn to Feel the Muscle Working

While this may seem so obvious as to not be useful, the reality is that getting this first lesson right can make a profound difference in the results a person gets from training. As a person learns to “feel” a muscle go through its range of motion, including where it starts and stops, they learn to start “listening” to their muscles as they exercise.

If I were starting off a new person on their first day, I would start first by teaching them how to feel the muscles they are training with a simple dumbbell exercise before starting the circuit of exercise machines most gyms feature. An ideal choice would be the [Romanian deadlift](#) with dumbbells. The reason this one is ideal is that getting it right starts several good learning processes at the same time.

First, it doesn't take much weight to feel the muscle being trained work. This helps because one never knows how strong the new person might be and helps avoid overwhelming them. The biggest reason to start with RDLs, however, is that it feels and works the best when the trainee's technique is correct. Once in the correct stance and posture, it's pretty easy to feel the glutes and hamstrings work and know the exercise is being done the right way.

Having a new trainee learn to pay attention to range of motion from the beginning of their experience can help prevent injuries later as the weight and intensity used increases. It gets them off on the right foot. Literally.

Another benefit to RDLs is that it is a free weight exercise done in a standing position. It puts a weight load, although a modest one, on much of the person's bone and muscular system. This load, over time and with proper nutrition, can help build bone mass to help avoid osteoporosis. According to Harvard Medical School², helping to avoid osteoporosis could be one of the more strategic reasons for doing strength training in the first place. The RDL specifically works the hips, knees, and spine, and the hips and spine are 2 of the most likely sites for a fracture.

Step 2: Learning to “Get Real” With Your Diet

While this may be the least popular part of starting a strength training program, it can have a huge positive effect on the results achieved. The reality is that a well-balanced diet will make the strength training work better and speed up the desired improvements in body composition.

The problems with the average person's diet are many, and there are often emotional and psychological issues that go with it. The details of achieving a proper diet go beyond the scope of this blog, but the basic steps that follow can start a process that a nutritional professional can help fine tune down the road.

The first thing a person should do is to install a food tracking app on their smart phone and begin logging everything they eat on a daily basis. While it may sound tedious and likely too much effort, doing it

² <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/strength-training-builds-more-than-muscles>

consistently is something many in the fitness community agree will help your fitness regimen the most. A link to some of the better ones is [here](#), and the cost for most of them is quite reasonable.

The biggest reason to start tracking everything one eats is that after a few days or weeks, it will become pretty obvious as to where improvements to your diet can be made. This isn't to say the changes have to come all at once. Far from it. What does need to be understood is that every single mouthful and calorie on that screen is a choice. Starting by removing one particularly bad choice and replacing it with a fruit or vegetable that can be lived with is a great start.

Somewhere a few weeks or months down the road, the results of the strength training will start kicking in. Weight might be going down as well, and the new trainee will start to feel like the work is making a difference in how they feel. At that point, the idea of sitting down with a nutritionist to map out a better nutritional plan might be seen as a good way to speed up the process.

The idea is to do all of this gradually. If the person feels like the changes are too drastic and coming too fast, they stop in most cases. It's far better to change a part of a meal here and there over time and let the results build on themselves.

What happens over time is that the second helping of one's favorite food starts getting easier to say no to. And then it gets easier to stop pouring gravy or cheese on everything. As the pounds continue to come off, another great thing starts to happen. People start to notice a person losing weight and mention it to them. This reinforces the positive decisions being made and genuinely feels rewarding.

The virtuous cycle started by tracking food intake begins to spin faster in the healthier direction, and the lesson that strategic little habits can produce big results gets learned.

Step 3: Monitoring Results and Adjusting to Circumstances and Motivation

Entering stage 3 of the process generally takes a few weeks, maybe months, and not everyone who walks into a gym gets this far. Lots of people give up fairly quickly because they realize there is no magic pill to swallow or device that will make the blubber around their waist fall off without a struggle. There isn't much that can be done for these folks other than to wish them well and put the effort into the ones that remain.

Just a Little is Plenty

What happens next, hopefully, is that some of the folks who remain are seeing some results and want to speed things up. There are many ways to do this, and they come down to the person's age, physical health, and level of motivation.

For some, once around the circuit of machines and some light treadmill work is enough. They learned how to do the exercises correctly, feel a bit stronger, and don't really want to go further toward the "b word." If they're happy with it, good for them. They will be getting benefits from the effort

expended and they're happy with it. This is generally an older trainer, and it is probably the right level for most over 65.

Training Wheels Coming Off

For a second group, generally in their 30's to 50's, they want to speed things up because they're liking what they're seeing and want more. The questions now focus on what they want more of. If they want more muscle, a few more free weight exercises can come into the routine, the weights start to go heavier, and more attention to nutrition surrounding the workout needs to be paid.

The nutritional upgrade should start with a protein shake within 45 minutes after the workout. The ideal timing would be a protein and carbohydrate heavy meal within that 1st hour to help maximize recuperation.

If fat loss is desired as well, cardio work comes into the picture, and this will come down to what the person's body will best tolerate. Walking at a good pace on a treadmill is a good place to start, and the pace can be increased if well tolerated.

Step 4: The "B Word" Can Finally Come Out and Play!

The last group to reveal themselves are generally younger, in better health, and are fairly well motivated to get results. Once they've been on the machines a few weeks, understand about good form and are actually doing it consistently, this group is ready to hear the "b-word" spoken openly and learn how to go about it.

As these are likely teens and 20-somethings but can be a bit older, they are ready to be introduced to routines that work to build a body. Some of the best came from the bodybuilders of the 50's and 60's and still work well today. Many of them focused on [training the whole body in 1 workout](#) and were intended to be done 3-4 times each week. If this beginning explanation of what it will take doesn't scare them off, let the work proceed below.

It is at this point where the aspiring strength trainers start to understand how much work goes into getting those big muscles they seek. They also need to understand that a big part of their success will come from both a careful diet and strategic supplementation, especially before, during, and after the workout. What makes the old-school routines especially good for new people to the sport is what they don't require: anabolic steroids.

A full discussion of steroids is beyond the scope of this blog, but if people understand that hard lifting, solid nutrition, and a good amount of sleep will build a very enviable, healthy physique, let that be it. In truth, steroids normally cause more harm than they're worth to the body. Most doctors will discourage the use of anabolic steroids for this purpose, and their huge cost is a downside the aspiring lifter generally doesn't know about or have the budget for.

Arguably worst of all is the fact that they are generally illegal without a prescription. Merely having some in your possession can carry a penalty of 1 year in prison and minimum \$1000 fine. The idea of doing time to get bigger arms should scare most people off. If they're smart.

Conclusion

When considering what can be done to increase the number of people benefitting from strength training, it all boils down to choosing the right fitness center and being willing to learn when you do find the place. The best locations will feature a committed staff who understands training and teaching enough to get new people started the right way.

From there, the overall environment within a gym that encourages members to ask questions and seek guidance on how to improve their results is crucial to success. The best advice that can be given to a person who truly wants things to work out (no pun intended) well for their fitness goals is to shop around for the right environment. While it's hard to fault a gym staff for trying to sell memberships, the best will also try to make effort to keep members happy and progressing for longer than the 1st 90 days of the year.

As Smokey Robinson sang many years ago, you better shop around.