

The Strength Training Primer For Women You've Been Waiting For

And we have to deal with all those Cosmo articles featuring suspiciously sweat-free models, waving around 2 lb pink dumbbells (why are they always *pink*?!).

Before we go further, understand that as a woman who is interested in strength training, you are in the minority and you may be on the receiving end of remarks such as these (all from well-wishers, of course!)

Myth #1: Women should stick to lifting 'lady weights'

Um, weights have no gender. And there's no scientific proof citing lifting weights as a contraindication for women (as long as the woman in question is pain-free, and has no underlying conditions)

Myth #2: Lifting weights will make you bulky

Nopes. The women who want to look bulky put in years of effort to look the way they do. 'Normal' strength training will make you look lean, fit and strong.

Myth #3: Women should not lift weights while on their period. Pregnant / menopausal / older women should not lift weights.

Did you know that strength training is equivalent to chewing calcium pills? And pregnant, menopausal, elderly women are at high risk for bone related disorders. Strength training doesn't just get your muscles stronger, it [improves bone health](#) too.

Now that we've gotten that out of the way, let's move on to,

What is strength training?

It is progressive overload intended to produce specific adaptations in the body. i.e. gradually lifting heavier and heavier weights over a period of time in order to get stronger / lose fat / run faster / jump higher, etc.

Strength training is not exclusive to say, the badass women you see on Instagram with muscles that put Schwarzenegger to shame, and lift the equivalent of a small house.

Strength training applies to all women - whether it helps you squat twice your bodyweight OR

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whether it helps you lift your child with ease, carry your suitcase around, and change water cans safely.

How do you start strength training?

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By the way, these guidelines apply to guys too. Because weights don't care about your gender. They just want to be lifted!

Our holy grail of strength training : **Do few exercises and do them well.**

The Internet is overflowing with pseudo experts and fitness celebrities trying to convince you to do the latest fancy looking move that'll guarantee you drop 5 kilos in the next 20 minutes. Guess what though, fancy does not mean effective. And don't trust anyone that promises a definite weight loss number!

Whether your goal is to get fitter, stronger or to just look better, there are certain exercises that are brutally effective. So if you can only do 5 movements in your strength training program, pick ones from this list.

The Quad's Top 5 Moves To Begin With

What exercises can you do?

1. Squat: Front/Back Squat, Split squat, Lunge
2. Hinge: Deadlift, Kettlebell Swing, Clean, Snatch
3. Push: Overhead Press, Bench Press, Plank, Push Up
4. Pull: Band Pull, Bent-over Row, Pull Up
5. Traverse: Run, Farmer carry, Crawl

And how do you put these together in a training programme?

There's no blanket recommendation for how many days a week you should lift weights. This varies for each of us depending on our goals, stress levels, the amount of time we can invest, etc. And a big factor is how quickly we can recover from each session. The benefits you gain from lifting weights do not happen to you when you are actually lifting; they happen over a 24-48 hour window following your workout. But here's the catch - if you do not rest enough in this window, these benefits are lost. So the quality and quantity of your sleep is an important thing to factor in when you're figuring out how often you should work out.

Let's consider the following scenario,

Person A :

- Working professional, regularly works 12 hour days
- Often goes through period of stress and struggles to get 6+ hours of sleep a day.
- Goal is general health and fat loss.

Person B :

- Professional athlete
- Work stress is low, sleeps 10-12 hours a day
- Goal is performance.

Should both these women invest the same number of hours in strength training per week?

Absolutely not!

Person A (i.e., you and I) cannot afford to train at the same intensity as a professional athlete. But we doesn't *need* to train at the same intensity as an athlete to get the results we're looking for. Remember, for an athlete, their performance is their livelihood so their lifestyles are built on training hard, eating well, and getting more than enough recovery and sleep. For you and I, we have to balance career, family, friends and other obligations. Our goal is not to win any competitions; it is to live healthier lives.

For most of us, two days of strength training - that involves full body movements - per week is adequate to keep us fit and strong. On top of this, we can invest another day in activity that gets us closer to our specific goals.

Here's an example of a basic training week

Day 1 : Strength: Squat and Row

Day 2 : Strength: Hinge and Push

Pick a squat variation - like the barbell front squat or double KB front squat, or the simple goblet squat. Pick a hinge variation - the deadlift is the obvious and best answer. Add in the row and the overhead press, and you have a solid set of movements.

How many sets and reps? 4 sets of 8-12 reps is a good place to start.

These two days of strength training are the foundation of your program. If you have only two days to train, do this. Think of these as the 'protein and vegetables' of your meal. Without them, your meal would be incomplete. Similarly, without these two days, your training would be incomplete.

Now to add Day 3 - or condiments - to your meal.

Day 3 : If you want to focus on fat loss, a simple conditioning workout

* 25 minutes, as many rounds as possible. * Work as fast as you can while maintaining good technique

- 8 burpees

- 80m run

Day 3 : Or do a bit more strength work

25 minutes, as many rounds as you can. Work with as heavy a weight as you can for the Farmer Carry and Lunges, while maintaining good technique

- 20 metre Farmer carry
- 20 metre Weighted Lunges
- 1 strong set - Plank / Push Up
- 1 strong set - Hang / Pull Up

And a few more pointers to help you train safely

- Value quality over quantity
 - Technique trumps everything else. When lifting weights - or doing any exercise in the gym - focus on maintaining good technique. This will keep you safe, and ensure the most benefit from whatever you do.
- Warm up and stretches - don't ignore these
 - Before you start your workout of the day, spend 10-15 minutes making sure your body is prepared for exertion. Similarly, after you put your body through a tough workout, take 10-15 minutes to calm down and relax your muscles. How to warm up and stretch is a different topic that we will cover in a different post :)

Strength training does not have to be intimidating or overwhelming. Start light, and work with weights that are well within your comfort zone. Over time you'll naturally be able to lift heavier and do more.

So there you have it. Our complete guide to strength training no matter where you are and what equipment you have access to. What are you waiting for? Get lifting :)