

"Begin Lifting Weights, Grandpa"

By NICKI ANDERSON
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Question

I am a 60-year-old male and have not been very active other than to play a periodic game of golf. My grandson told me that I could lift weights and improve my balance, which isn't very good, as well as my heart. Is that possible at my age? By the way, I am on high blood pressure medication, weigh about 220 pounds and am 6 feet tall.

Answer

Your grandson is giving you sound advice. Lifting weights to increase strength does great things for the body – at any age. In fact, strength training may be more important for middle-aged and older adults than it is for younger people. And several studies show that weight

training improves cardiovascular conditioning and reduces the risk or progression of osteoporosis.

I shared your question with fitness expert Phil Campbell, author of "Ready, Set, Go! Synergy Fitness." He agreed that strength training offers many benefits for older adults, including increased endurance, lower blood pressure, reduced insulin resistance and body fat, and increased resting metabolic rate. Strength training reduces pain in knee joints. Most importantly, it lowers the risk of falls by improving balance. Falls can be deadly in older populations.

Campbell cited research reported on the National Institute of Health's Web site, which concludes that "a prolonged total strength-training program would lead to large gains in maximal strength and

power." While this almost sounds like an ad in a muscle magazine for ripped bodybuilders, it's not. This is how mainstream researchers describe the impact of weight training for men in your age group.

Campbell added that it takes a combination of functional exercises like walking, tai chi, swimming, running or specific balance and stability exercises to apply the strength gains produced from weight training in order to improve balance. Experienced fitness professionals understand the need for balance and stability training and typically add it to a client's fitness plans.

So how do you get started? It's important to begin any exercise program with a progressive fitness plan in mind. This

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Lifting Weights—

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simply means that you should start with low-intensity exercise, once your physician gives you the go-ahead.

After several weeks, progressively move the intensity up to a moderate level. Once you're conditioned with this level of exercise intensity, researchers show that high-intensity exercise is effective for adults of all ages.

One concern that trainers have for their clients, especially those with high blood pressure, is the need for proper breathing. Holding your breath during strength training can cause your blood pressure to dramatically increase, so you want to be sure to breathe throughout your repetitions. I tell my clients to count out loud, which helps to regulate breathing.

There's one other important study that Campbell says just may inspire you to make the commitment to begin a strength training program today. Researchers took 40 adults whose average age was 69, divided them into two groups and had them complete either six months of weight training or six months of endurance training.



REPRESENTING KATE HAVEN AND FOREST HILLS at the Scholarship Scramble were, from the left, Pete Grover, Kate Haven GC; Dan Trudeau, Forest Hills GC; Kate Haven Superintendent Tom Lundgren, and Scott Thomas, Forest Hills GC.

The results were surprising. The endurance-trained group improved "oxidative capacity" (the body's ability to supply oxygen to the blood) by 31 percent, but the resistance-trained group improved 57 percent. The weight-training group also experienced a 10 percent increase in muscle size.

Since the endurance group in this study made remarkable improvements and the resistance-training group almost doubled those positive results, why not make the commitment today to add

strength training to your fitness improvement plan? And then tell your grandson that he'd better watch out, because you may be challenging him to a bench press contest in a few months!

(Editor's Note: Phil Campbell offers a free newsletter that tracks the research in the area of fitness training for older adults. Visit www.readyssetgofitness.com. Nicki Anderson is a certified personal trainer, author and owner of Reality Fitness in Naperville at www.realityfitness.com)

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