



What Keeps Older Adults Independent Isn't What You'd Expect

When was the last time you had to run a mile? I'm guessing it's been a while. When was the last time you had to lift or carry something, and found it difficult? Probably more recently, maybe even earlier today. And possibly every day, depending on your circumstances.



So we must build strength to get through the day and live a long healthy life.

Let me go out on a limb here. This might sound crazy, but...

Strength training is *the most* important form of fitness training you should do to remain healthy and active as you age.

Dr. Peter Attia, the well known author of *Outlive, The Science and Art of Longevity*, says that everyone, regardless of age, should be doing strength training if they want to live a long and healthy life. (1)

Another great source is the book *The Barbell Prescription: Strength Training for Life After 40* by Jonathon Sullivan, MD, PhD and Andy Baker, SSC. The authors go into remarkable scientific detail to substantiate their claim that strength training is critical for aging well. For them, aging is an extreme sport for which you must do strength training.

The most complete statement of the importance of strength training on health as we age is the National Strength and Conditioning Association's *Position Statement on Resistance Training for Older Adults*. It covers training program variables, the physiological adaptations to strength training, the benefits for older adults and the impact of strength training on chronic conditions such as sarcopenia. They cite 630 scientific articles to support their position.

I have more great news! We now know that a combination of strength and aerobic activity works best for living a long and active life. Researchers at Brigham Young University and the University of Minnesota followed more than 400,000 US adults

aged 18 to 84 over more than 10 years (2). They found that a combination of muscle strengthening exercises and aerobic activity produce a greater reduction in mortality risk than either form of exercise alone. Specifically, they found that the minimum effective “dose” of 1 muscle strengthening workout per week or 1 hour of moderate to vigorous aerobic activity significantly reduced all cause mortality. Two muscle strengthening workouts per week and 3 hours of moderate to vigorous aerobic activity per week yielded even bigger improvements. Additional workouts of either kind produced only modest improvements in mortality.

Let's get the new year off to a great start. Let's do something that will change our lives for the better.

Here are my three favorite strength training exercises:



Squats are great for getting out of chairs, climbing stairs and picking up your grandchild among other activities. Squats build muscles of the legs, hips and core.

Start easy with chair squats. If you can stand up from a chair 3 times without too much effort, try going for 5. If you can do 5, go for 7. You get the idea.

If you are using your hands to get up from a chair, make it your goal to be able to stand up without using your hands. As you get stronger, you can add weight and repetitions. Squats can be done anywhere.



Push-ups are good for opening doors, better posture and a host of activities. Push-ups strengthen the muscles of the arms, chest, shoulders and core.

Start easy with wall push-ups. Work up to 12 reps and then lower the angle to a stable counter. This will be harder, so start with fewer reps and work up

to 12. As you get stronger you can go lower to a sofa and eventually to the floor for push-ups from your knees. When you can do 12 knee push-ups you are ready for a full hand and toe push up. Being able to do a full hand and toe push-up is an accomplishment for someone in their 60s and beyond. Congratulations!

Farmer's Carry/Walk: This exercise is universal. It helps you carry grocery bags, suitcases, golf clubs, dog food, a wheelbarrow; all the stuff you carry during daily life. The farmer's carry builds strength in the legs, core, back, shoulders, arms and hands.



Start easy with a light dumbbell or a bag with books for weight, one in each hand, and walk around for 30-45 secs. You could even use a wheelbarrow and adjust the load. You can add weight or time to make it more challenging as you get stronger. The fun part is when you put the weight down after the exercise. All of a sudden you feel lighter and it becomes easier to move. If I could only do one

exercise, I would choose the farmer's carry.

Start easy by choosing just one of these exercises. You will be amazed at how far you can go.

You can even use your new strength to do something light-hearted.



1. Peter Attia on Strength Training (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ekuUwHFeTB8>)
2. Coleman CJ, et al. (2022). Br J Sports Med.1–7. doi:10.1136/bjsports-2022-105519

Fun Fact



Grandma Powerlifter

Catherine “Kay” Kuehn is the Grandma Powerlifter who set a world record in the deadlift of 104lbs at the age of 94.

When she was in her 60s a scan showed she had below average bone density. Her husband Dick, a physician, recommended that she take up strength training to slow the onset of osteoporosis.

Now, more than 20 years later, she holds multiple world records and is an inspiration to younger folks in their 70s and 80s. Her recommendation for healthy aging: “Move as much as you can.”



To learn more about Catherine, watch this short New Yorker documentary about her (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3pYLcR70JA>)

Here is an article from her hometown newspaper, The Redmond Spokesman <https://redmondspokesman.com/2022/11/02/94-year-old-redmond-woman-aims-for-another-deadlifting-record/>)

Personal Note: Sofa Supersets

In supersets you do two different exercises with little rest in between each set and then repeat. They often involve different muscle groups such as bench press (triceps, shoulders and chest) and rowing (biceps, shoulders and back). Supersets are intended to be time efficient, increase metabolic demand and improve muscle endurance.

The other day, when we got home from our workout at the gym, my wife and I decided to move our large sofa to the other side of the living room. We removed the pillows and cushions from the sofa and stacked them neatly (arms and shoulders). We each then took one end of the sofa and lifted it, using mostly our legs and some back muscles, and carried it to the opposite wall. Then we replaced the pillows and cushions. Once the sofa was in place, we realized that the view of the room was not good. So, we moved the sofa back to its original position.

I am so glad we do strength training in our workouts. And, we were glad when the last superset was done!



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