



The Scoop on Strength Training

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If you asked ten people at the gym what is the best way to strength train you would likely get ten different answers. So how do you know what is best? How many reps should you do? How many sets and how many times a week?

The reality is there is not a single best way to do it. It all depends on what works for you. Individuality is key in all aspects of training. Unfortunately there is no magic pill or potion to create big muscles and a trim body. Fitness like everything else in life requires work to be successful. And the amount of success depends on how hard you are willing to work. There are however, a few principles of strength training that everyone can follow.

First is to understand how to build strength. How many reps should you do for a single exercise? Generally 8-12 reps build strength the quickest. But 4-8 or 12-15 is fine too. Strength gains occur at a slower rate when performing more than 15 reps. There is no need to do more than 20. When you lift heavier weights less times you recruit type 2 muscle fibers which build bigger stronger muscles. When you lift lighter weights and do more reps you recruit more type 1 fibers which are smaller and used more for endurance. So if you want muscular endurance do more reps at a lighter weight. If you want muscle strength lift heavier weights. Really both are needed.

How many times a week should you lift? Three times has been found sufficient for building strength and endurance. It is fine to do it every other day as well, one day lower body and the next upper. Never train a muscle group two days in a row. Recovery is a needful part of the process. It is actually in rest that a muscle becomes stronger as it works to rebuild itself.

How many sets are enough for any one exercise? One set is fine if done properly. Given the time, ability and interest it is wise to ask yourself if getting just slightly more gains in strength is worth 3-4 sets for each muscle group. Two sets does not equal twice the strength of one. When one set is performed properly research shows that there is NO indication that multiple sets are better. As far as what weight to use on any given exercise, you should be able to do 10-15 reps comfortably. The last few should feel hard to do. When 15 reps is easy it is time to increase the weight. Make sure to focus on proper form, no cheating! Don't swing the weights and don't do the exercise too fast or too slow. Aim for a nice controlled motion and speed.

Black Hills Health and Education Center is a medical wellness retreat offering wellness programs and lifestyle change in a beautiful setting of the Black Hills in South Dakota. BHHEC is unique in that it offers a Christian based lifestyle program that includes everything from lodging and meals, physicals and comprehensive blood work, to daily treatments, exercise sessions with a personal trainer in the gym, classes presented by physicians, the Dietician, the Fitness Director, and other staff, cooking classes, sightseeing tours (Mt. Rushmore, Crazy Horse, Custer State Park Wild Animal Game preserve) and aquatics classes at the lovely swim center in Rapid City. Also included are counselling and stress-relief classes.