

## The importance of maintaining your muscles.

Living Now magazine health article for Jan/Feb edition 2011.

Abstract: The importance of maintaining muscle.

On the subject of good health and weight management, a vital aspect that is often overlooked is the importance of maintaining your muscles. This is especially vital for women. In the case of dieting, you risk the loss of vital muscle mass which is the powerhouse of the body. Muscle loss is the most neglected area in maintaining good health. That's good health for everything, from your bones to your brain. Simple weight exercise three times per week is all it takes to maintain good health.



### **The importance of maintaining your muscles.**

On the subject of good health and weight management, a vital aspect that is often overlooked is the importance of maintaining your muscles. This is especially important for women. In the case of dieting, you risk the loss of vital muscle which is the powerhouse of the body. I could scream every time someone says to me I lost X amount of weight in just 2 weeks or whatever. The risk with rapid weight loss is you lose muscle content too. Where do you think you burn that fat? It's in your muscles and the more muscle you lose the harder it is to manage your weight. After all, you are practically guaranteed to put it all back on because of what is described as your "Fat Point", does not get altered. You replace the weight you lose plus more because you have lost muscle mass. We know it as yo-yo dieting.

Yes, there are other factors involved, but this is the most neglected area in maintaining good health. Men find it easier to lose weight because generally they have more muscle mass and that's related to testosterone levels. I don't want to enter into a diatribe on dieting, for now I want to stress the importance of muscle and health. For example...If you believe that a few serves of dairy a day will prevent osteoporosis, then you are wrong. You can have bucket loads of calcium in your diet but if you do not stress the bones, your body will not lay down the calcium for support. You stress the bones by building muscle with weights. I've just lost half of you haven't I? I'm not talking about looking like an Olympic weightlifter; women couldn't do that anyway unless they cheated with added testosterone.

What I am begging you to consider is adding some weights to your exercise routine. Not just for weight management, but general health, for the following vital reasons. Between the ages of 20 and 40 the average female loses 3.6kg of muscle and gains 10kg of fat. Between 20 and 80 the average male loses one quarter of his muscle mass. Running, cycling or other aerobic sports will not prevent this loss. Muscle is the engine in which body fat is burned for fuel so if you don't have

much muscle you can't lose much fat. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition compared the levels of body fat in groups of women, showing sedentary women have 21% body fat, aerobic exercisers have 16% body fat, and resistance exercisers have 14% body fat. A study at Stanford University showed clearly that about 20% of bone mineral density is dependent on maintaining muscle. The British Journal of Sports Medicine study shows that even in elderly women, a one year weight training program increased their strength by 19-29% with a concomitant increase in bone density.

Did you know your immunity is also dependant on muscle? Immune strength depends on availability of the amino acid glutamine, and your muscles have to supply the glutamine to your immune system in order for it to work. The more muscle you have the more abundant the glutamine supply and other things equal, the better your immune system works. Studies also show that weight training improves glucose tolerance in patients with Type 2 (adult onset) diabetes. Weight training or resistance exercise can also be beneficial for arthritis. A study at the University of Nebraska gave a group of patients with osteoarthritis of the knee an 8 week strength training program. Results showed that the weight work caused a significant decline in arthritis activity. One last vital fact. Muscle produces 60% of your glutamine which is a precursor to the antioxidant glutathione, the brain's master antioxidant. Glutamine is considered to be a nonessential amino acid because it is made by the body and is not absolutely required to be obtained through the diet. However, the major tissue in the body for producing glutamine is muscle. Glutathione is the body's main detoxifier of toxins, which is critical to survival. It also turns off inflammation and restores declining immune functions. So that's why you need to maintain your muscles.

If you are thinking that a regular exercise routine is all too hard or too time consuming, you may be surprised. I'm sure we all agree that lack of exercise has become endemic in our labour-saving culture. And once the sedentary lifestyle has set in, exercise requires a huge effort, an effort that initially brings only pain and exhaustion. It does not have to be that way. Yes you need to exercise, but it has to be the right exercise, exercise that will support your body lifelong. Low-impact aerobics classes, spinning, pretend boxing, power walking, any of the latest fad movements designed to catch your fancy, plus all those treadmills, stair steppers, cross country ski simulators, and elliptical gizmo's, are admirable for boosting profits, fair for maintaining cardiovascular fitness, but hopeless as lifelong, enjoyable activity, and next to useless in controlling body fat or building muscle.

There are a number of reasons these gym antics and gadgets do not work. First, the usual 40 minute sessions of aerobic work 3 to 4 times per week burns negligible body fat and does not build muscle. Suffice to say here that most overweight folk neglect the essential factor that enables use of significant body fat during aerobic exercise. Your stomach has to be empty when you do it. Otherwise your body, which always takes the easiest route, will convert the food in your gut to energy, and will leave your body fat practically untouched. The second reason aerobic exercise is ineffective, is that it takes 15 to 20 minutes of exercise for the body to trigger use of body fat as fuel. Even then, fat is released and used easily, only if the hormonal signalling system is working properly. So at least half or more of every average aerobic session is using mostly sugar, not fat and still not building muscle.

The third reason for the failure of aerobic exercise to control body fat is that it does not maintain muscle. Muscle is the engine that uses body fat for fuel. You have to use a system of resistance exercise that will maintain muscle lifelong. All you need to know to control body fat and

maintain good health is do the correct weight workout three times minimum per week. That's right, just three days per week to maintain your health. If you want to lose fat, then you will need to do your weights five times per week until you have achieved your goal.

The key is to exercise the major muscle groups on different days. To begin, always take 5 or 10 minutes of light aerobic exercise and stretching as a warm-up. For a three day exercise routine with weights, exercise the shoulders and arms on day 1. Day 2 for chest and back, while day 3 is legs and abdominals. Have a rest day between each day and take the weekend off. It can be that simple. If you need the five day routine you exercise the shoulders, arms, chest, back, and then legs with abdominals on separate days. Keeping to a weekly routine means each set of muscles is only stressed once every five days allowing the muscle to renew and grow. So I hope I have convinced you. If you already incorporate weights into your exercise routine then I applaud you. Your next challenge is to tell every young teen girl you know. If they are staying slim just by controlling their diet, they risk osteoporosis later in life.



Mark Pasley DipACN (London) is a practitioner of Energy Healing and has studied Applied Clinical Nutrition under Dr Laurent Bannock DrHs, MS, LN.