

Adult Development and Aging News Column

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 31, 2016

Wildcat Extension

Author: Chuckie Hessong

Title: Never Too Old to Build Muscle Mass



Never Too Old to Build Muscle Mass

The New Year is upon us and many have the annual grand idea of having the body of our youth back by committing to an exercise program. Are those youthful muscles even possible?

Let's start with the good news about aging muscles. You can rebuild them, even if you are middle-aged or older.

Research shows repeatedly that older muscles will grow and strengthen. Studies show, men and women in their 60s and 70s who began supervised weight training developed muscles that were as large and strong as those of your average 40-year-old.

But the process of bulking up works differently in older people than in the young.

According to Marcus Bamman, the director of the UAB Center for Exercise Medicine at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, skeletal muscles are composed of various types of fibers and two things happen to those fibers after we reach middle age. Some die, especially if we have not been exercising our muscles much. Sedentary adults can lose 30 to 40 percent of the total number of fibers in their muscles by the time they are 80.

Others of the fibers remain alive but shrink and atrophy as we age.

We increase the size of our atrophied muscle fibers with exercise but, for a variety of physiological reasons, do not add to the number of fibers, Dr. Bamman says.

But in practical terms, who cares? Older muscles will become larger and stronger if you work them, Dr. Bamman says.

The key is regular and progressive weight training.

The appearance of strong muscles can only be accomplished through strength training and a minimal layer of fat over the muscles. This is best accomplished through a healthy diet and increased physical activity.

Strength training does more than improve your looks. It will lead to stronger bones which reduces the risk of osteoporosis and fractures; improve blood cholesterol and blood sugar; improve posture; decrease back pain; improve arthritis pain; and even improve mood and self-confidence.

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If you are interested in beginning a weight training routine, contact your local Wildcat Extension District office to join the next Stay Strong, Stay Healthy program in your area where you will learn the basics of strength training. This 8-week program is for 60-year-old and older.

Upcoming classes:

Edna—January 10-March 14, call 620-784-5337.

Pittsburg—February 14-April 13, call 620-724-8233.

Sources:

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<http://well.blogs.nytimes.com>