

Chapter 1

Weight Training for Life

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering why everyone needs weight training
 - ▶ Gauging your fitness level and setting goals
 - ▶ Choosing the right tools to get you in shape
 - ▶ Training safely to enjoy a lifetime of strength and well-being
 - ▶ Deciding which exercises and routines help you best achieve your goals
 - ▶ Finding out how weight training fits into an overall healthy lifestyle
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Weight training on a regular basis improves your strength, endurance, confidence, appearance, health, longevity, and quality of life. Beginning a weight-training program is one of the best decisions you can make for your health, well-being, and physical and mental performance. Consistent weight training helps reduce your stress, manage your weight, strengthen your bones, lower your risk of injury, and gives you a competitive edge in all aspects of life.

In this chapter, you find out why weight training benefits all bodies at every age and fitness level; why it's important to assess your fitness and set goals; what tools to use; why safety measures are essential for a lifetime of enjoyable training; how to decide which exercises, routines, and training settings are right for you; and how to achieve total wellness beyond simply lifting weights. If you want to find out more, each section tells you which chapters provide the necessary details.

Weight Training for All Bodies

Modern living provides every convenience except one: a lot of natural physical activity. From young to old, we ride in cars, use remote controls, step into elevators, play on the computer, and shop online. Many activities that required us to get up out of the chair and use our muscles no longer exist. The result: We need to add weight training to our lives to stimulate our bodies and our brains to keep us healthy and strong.

People of all ages — kids, teens, young adults, pregnant women, and older adults — benefit from weight training (see Chapters 20 and 21). The risks of doing nothing are greater than the risks of injury from exercise — even for the frail and elderly. Whether you're a beginner who wants to get started safely or you're already fit and you want to improve your performance, weight training improves your current condition (whatever that is) and helps you achieve your goals of feeling stronger and better about yourself.

Strong muscles help us move better and avoid pain and injury at all stages of life. Weight training provides the following benefits:

- ✓ Increased strength and endurance
- ✓ Improved sleep
- ✓ Reduced stress
- ✓ Enhanced feelings of confidence and well-being
- ✓ Reduced risk of falls
- ✓ Strengthened bones
- ✓ Boosted metabolism for more energy burn around the clock
- ✓ Full, independent living

Because weight training strengthens your muscles and improves your muscular endurance, you'll naturally have more energy to be more active throughout the day. When you're physically tired, you're able to fall asleep more easily and enjoy a deeper, better quality of sleep. As you're more refreshed and energetic, you feel better and accomplish more, which improves your mood and confidence level. In this manner, your consistent training stimulates an upward cycle of well-being.

Don't wait. Absorb everything you need to know from this book to get going with a program that is perfect for you. Keep taking the steps you need to achieve stronger, more toned muscles for a fuller, more enjoyable and active life.

Fitness Testing and Goal Setting for Success

When it comes to weight training, one size doesn't fit all. In order to create a program that best meets your needs, you need to know what your conditioning level is, what you want to achieve with your training, and how to set goals and monitor your progress for success (see Chapter 2).



Fifty percent of all people who begin a new training program quit in the first six to eight weeks. Most people say that the reason for quitting is that they don't have enough time. A research study of prison inmates, who had all the time in the world for their exercise program, showed the same dropout rate. Leading behavioral scientists have concluded that the real reason people don't stick to new exercise programs isn't lack of time — it's because changing your habits for something new is difficult, especially if motivation is lacking.

To keep this from happening to you, we offer strategies to avoid dropping off the weight-lifting wagon in Chapter 2.

Safety First to Enjoy Training

Before beginning any exercise program, ensure that you're both ready and able. Get clearance from a healthcare professional if necessary. Study and apply the safety tips discussed in Chapter 5 to avoid common mistakes that cause injuries.

Take time to discover the correct use of equipment (see Chapter 4) and to perform exercises by using good form and technique (see Part III). Regular weight training improves muscle balance, posture, movement efficiency, stability, and body awareness. All these qualities reduce the likelihood of injury, as well as the onset of typical aches and pains such as those associated with the lower back, knees, shoulders, or hips.

Choosing Your Training Equipment

In fitness magazines, health clubs, and DVDs, you often hear weight equipment referred to as *resistance equipment*. We hate to clutter your brain with jargon right off the bat, but *resistance* is a word you need to know. Resistance is an opposing force, like a weight or gravity; in order for your muscles to get stronger, you must work against resistance. *Resistance equipment* is actually a more accurate term than *weight equipment* because you can build muscle without using weights at all. For example, rubber exercise bands (see Chapter 23) don't weigh more than a couple of ounces, but they provide enough resistance to strengthen your muscles. Throughout this book, we use the terms *resistance training*, *weight training*, *strength training*, and *weight lifting* interchangeably.

Keep in mind that understanding how to train your muscles is like studying a new skill. You aren't born with this knowledge, in spite of the fact that you were born with a body. Many people have the misconception that because they live in a body, they know how to train it. You'll benefit significantly by taking the time to study and acquire the skills from qualified professionals.

Finding out how to use equipment properly is an early step in this process. In this book, we do our best to break this information down in a way that is complete and easy to follow. Take your time. Be patient with yourself. Soon, you'll be lifting like a pro. Chapter 4 outlines all the information that you need to know to demystify the weight room. Refer back to Chapter 4 as often as you need. Give yourself time to experience the equipment and absorb the information.

Resistance training equipment falls into many common categories:

- ✔ **Free weights:** Free weights include dumbbells, barbells, bars, and weight plates. These come in a variety of shapes, sizes, materials, and weights (see Chapter 4 for more information).
- ✔ **Machines:** Weight machines generally include a seat, a cable or pulley, a variety of weight plates for adjustable resistance, and movable bars. Similar to free weights, machines vary widely in design (see Chapter 4). Newer machines come equipped with programming features and provide feedback while you're training.
- ✔ **Resistance bands and tubing:** Rubber bands and tubes provide opportunities for strength training any time and any place. Bands are flat and wide; tubes are round. Cheap, lightweight, and portable bands and tubes are the training tool of choice for frequent travelers. Latex-free versions are available for people with allergies. (We discuss bands and tubes in Chapter 23.)

Although not strictly in the category of resistance-training equipment, the following tools provide a means to enhance your weight-training programs:

- ✔ **Balls and foam rollers:** Add balls and foam rollers into many exercises to provide an unstable surface on which to work. Incorporating this element of instability increases the difficulty of the exercise by requiring the use of deeper abdominal and back muscles (see Chapter 24).
- ✔ **Body weight:** Your body may not feel like a training tool, but use your own body weight to provide effective resistance in a number of exercises such as the squat and lunge (see Chapter 14) and the push-up (see Chapter 10).
- ✔ **Yoga and Pilates:** Yoga and Pilates aren't styles of weight training; however, many yoga and Pilates moves involve challenges that strengthen muscles. The particular advantage of many of these exercises is that they also involve flexibility and encourage the development of strength, balance, and coordination through movement patterns (see Chapter 22 for more information on yoga and Pilates).

Selecting the Right Exercises, Routines, and Training Settings

Deciding whether to train at home or at the gym, whether to take a group exercise class or hire a personal trainer, can be difficult. Chapter 6 provides clear guidelines on how to determine whether training at home is right for you and how to set up a home gym. If you decide that working with a DVD at home is best, Chapter 6 also gives you a lot of practical advice for how to follow along.

Chapter 7 helps you select a gym that meets your needs and tells you everything you need to know about how to fit in and follow the rules of gym etiquette. If you're thinking that a personal trainer may be your best option, check out Chapter 7 — it shows you how to pick a trainer to meet your needs. Chapter 7 also tells you how to select a group fitness instructor who makes you feel comfortable.

Getting started with your weight-training program means selecting the right exercises and routines that meet your goals and fit your personality and lifestyle. The perfect program is the one that fits you. Part III describes all the exercises that you need. Part IV offers a variety of workout programs that feature the exercises.

Weight training today is for all bodies, not only the bodybuilders of previous decades. Whether you're a mom supervising your kid's fitness program or an older adult with special needs, find a program that suits you. There's no reason not to get started right away and to enjoy the many benefits weight training has to offer.

Living a Healthy Lifestyle

Weight training is an important key to living a full and healthy life from childhood to older age. We lose muscle mass as we age due to the gradual loss of efficiency in the process of cellular reproduction (the same reason your hair turns gray). Unless you add stimulation to your muscles, such as weight training to maintain or to build muscle mass, you'll lose your current muscle mass. Weight training alone can't provide everything you need to get and stay strong and fit. You need good nutrition, adequate sleep, stress management, and a strong network of good relationships with friends and family for social support.

Pumping up your heart and lungs

Aerobic exercise or cardio training is necessary to keep your heart and lungs healthy and to reduce the risk of diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes, as you age. The best form of cardio exercise for most people is walking — it's cheap and easy, and walking requires little planning and offers a low risk of injury.



Make time for 30 minutes of cardio activity at least four days a week. Your efforts count even if you walk only ten minutes at a time, three times a day. To find out more about increasing your cardio activity through walking, read *Fitness Walking For Dummies*, by Liz Neporent (Wiley).

Improving your flexibility

Stretching is one of the most enjoyable, feel-good exercises that improves your ease of movement and reduces your risk of injury. Stretching to improve flexibility is best at the end of your workout when your muscles are warm. See Chapter 16 for up-to-date information on the whys and how-to's of stretching.

Balancing options and training your brain

Like most aspects of fitness, if you don't practice balance, you lose your ability to maintain your balance, and this loss increases your chance of falling. Certain sports, such as skiing, skating, and surfing, also require good balance for effective performance.

Adding a few extra balance challenges to your weight-training routine is easy and makes all the difference that you need to move with greater confidence and skill. Coordinated moves that require concentration and challenge both the mind and body are also good for maintaining a healthy body and mind. Yoga and Pilates offer many valuable exercises that train these aspects of fitness. Read Chapter 22 to discover the latest important information about balance and coordination.