

Strength Training for the Aging Workforce

As we age, our bodies lose muscle mass. And, when that muscle is gone, our strength goes with it. Our energy levels also begin to flag, making it harder to keep up with the demands of the job. However, it's not all bad news, because strength training can help keep us fit as we grow older.

In this Safety Talk, we'll look at what actually happens to our bodies as we age, why weight lifting helps us stay fit, and which exercises will help maintain muscle mass and strength.

What Can Go Wrong

At one time, most people retired at or before age 60. That situation has changed today as many people still enjoy the work they do and want to continue doing it. Other older workers can't retire because of insufficient savings or pensions. In either case, older workers' wisdom, experience and knowledge are a bonus to everyone on their team.

Still, many older workers deal with physical issues such as

cardiovascular disease, diabetes and osteoarthritis. They also experience age-related sarcopenia (loss of muscle mass), which reduces their stamina and can be a factor in falls and other work-related injuries.

How to Protect Yourself

Fortunately, muscle loss and lack of stamina can be combatted by regular exercise. Strength training, in particular, is essential to staying healthy and fit as we age. The recommended activity amounts for older workers are:

- Thirty minutes of cardiovascular exercise five times a week.
- Twenty minutes of strength training three times a week, with a break between each session.

Some strength training exercises include:

- Wrist curls
- Arm raises, including overhead, side, and front motions
- Arm curls
- Seated row weight lifting
- Wall push-ups
- Chair stand exercises
- Toe stand exercises

There are many more strength training exercises. Find something that works for you and do it.

Safety is always a concern when working out. Older adults need to be careful, particularly if they have had back or hip surgery in the past. Here are some other things they can do to stay safe:

- Breathe regularly. Holding your breath starves your body of oxygen and your muscles can't work at their best.
- Use proper form. Keep the body in alignment to avoid injuries.
- Don't lock your joints. Stay loose and flexible to keep joints free from injury.

Remember, have a doctor or physical trainer review any exercise routine before moving forward.

Final Word

Aging in today's world doesn't mean having to retire before age 60. It does mean taking care of your body to continue working, though. Use the tips and suggestions in this Safety Talk to stay strong and fit as you age.

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