

# Everything You Need To Know About Resistance Training

Including how to get started, because you definitely should!



BY JULIA SULLIVAN, CPT

PUBLISHED: JAN 14, 2021



RYANJLANE // GETTY IMAGES

I'm going to go out on (a very short) limb and say that, if you've been working on your fitness, you've probably heard the term *resistance training* by now. You've probs even heard it used interchangeably with *strength training* perhaps. They are, in fact, very similar to the whole rectangle and square sitch you learned about in geometry class.

That is to say, strength training is a type of resistance training, but not all resistance training is going to help you get stronger. "So, you can think of strength training as a subset of resistance training, in which you have a specific goal in mind," says Sohee Lee, a certified strength and conditioning specialist and *Women's Health* advisory board member.

What is resistance training, then? Simply put: Resistance training encompasses any type of exercise in which your muscles have to overcome some sort of oppositional force, whether from equipment (like dumbbells, kettlebells, or resistance bands) or even just your bodyweight, Lee explains. That means HIIT, plyometrics, Pilates, and yoga all count as resistance training, too.

Some types can help you get stronger, while others will aid in improving your muscular endurance, speed, agility, power, or reaction times.

## 4 Big Benefits You'll Reap From Resistance Training

Resistance training can help you improve your health and fitness in a number of different ways. "With resistance training, you can change your body composition (i.e. your ratio of lean muscle mass to body fat), improve your cardio fitness level, boost your mental health, and just have fun," says Lee.

Yes—you heard that right. Exercise. Fun. (And as someone who adopted powerlifting, I can fully attest that there is no more exciting adrenaline rush than picking up and slamming a barbell. Promise.)

In case you need some more convincing, though, here are five of the most prominent benefits you'll see from a resistance training routine.

### 1. It'll make your heart and bones stronger.

Less than an hour of lifting weights per week may reduce your risk of heart attack or stroke by upwards of 40 to 70 percent, according to one Similarly, Iowa State University study.

What's more: Weight bearing exercises improve bone density and prevents bone loss, which is a key factor in preventing age-related fractures down the line, according to research published in the journal *Endocrinology and Metabolism*.

### 2. You'll reduce your risk of injury.

Stronger muscles don't just mean extra strength and power. Resistance training actually increases your ligaments' flexibility and promotes balance among your muscles, which help you avoid common movement-related injuries, according to a *British Journal of Medicine* study.

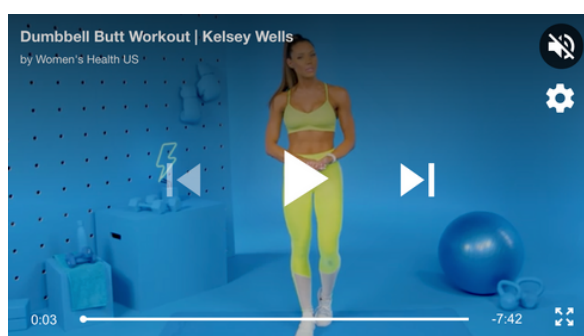
### 3. You'll increase your lean muscle mass

If one your fitness goals is to lose fat and gain muscle at the same time, then adding resistance training to your workout routine is essential, according to experts. "Building muscle is actually quite difficult," says Lee.

And, good news for beginners: "The less experience you have, the faster your gains will be in the beginning," Lee says. Basically, you'll see a satisfying change in your body composition (how much muscle versus fat you have) straight away after embarking on a resistance training program.

For more advanced exercisers, the key is to consistent with your workouts and continue to progressively challenge your bod. This could mean lifting with heavier weights, working at different tempos, or increasing your rep volume or intensity level on the regular.

*Build your booty with this dumbbell workout from Kelsey Wells:*



## 4. It can help boost your mental health

While improved body composition, heart and bone protection, and injury prevention are obviously worthy reasons to start resistance training, the biggest, possibly most important benefit is a bit more intangible.


People with mild to moderate depression who resistance trained at least two days per week experienced a significant reduction in symptoms, according to one 2018 JAMA Psychiatry study. And in people who weren't flagged for depression beforehand? A single workout equaled a substantial mood boost.

## 4 Major Types of Resistance Training

### 1. Bodyweight

Not only is this the most accessible form of resistance training, but it's the ideal place for beginners to start getting familiar with common movement patterns so that they can perfect their form and avoid injuries later when they start lifting heavier loads.

Start with this ultimate, 4-week *bodyweight challenge to sculpt yourself from head to toe*.

 **Pro tip:** Make bodyweight exercises harder by slowing down their eccentric, or lowering, phase.

### 2. Resistance Bands

"Resistance bands are easily portable, low-cost, can be used anywhere, and are ideal for beginners," explains trainer Norma Lowe, CPT. "They offer a very safe level of resistance." Plus, they're a great alternative to free weights because the added instability they supply increases muscle activation, making them as effective as dumbbells for upper-body moves, in particular, per recent research published in the *Journal of Human Kinetics*.

Start with the *22 best resistance band exercises for a total-body workout. Enjoy!*

### 3. Free Weights

This is Lee's fav type of resistance — for good reason. "Using weights offers you a straightforward way to measure your progress overtime," she notes. "As you add more weight, you know you're getting stronger. If you're looking to achieve a toned look, weights should be your go-to."

Don't feel like you need dumbbells, kettlebells, or barbells, either. Household objects like filled backpacks and gallon jugs work just as well. Medicine balls, ankle weights, and weighted vests also fit the bill.

Start with any of these *at-home workouts*.

### 4. Machines

If you're going to the gym and don't want to rely on a spotter to help you resistance train, learning to lift with machines is your best bet.

*Your go-to machines:* Hamstring extension machine, quad extension machine, lat pull-down machine, back row machine, and cable machines (for triceps extensions or chest flies).

## How To Get Started With Resistance Training

Now that you're sold on resistance training, I've got more encouraging news for you: There's no right or wrong approach. Depending on whether you have access to a gym or equipment, your work schedule, or any other uncontrollable external factors, you might only have time (and space) for 10 minutes of bodyweight squats every other day. And that's perfectly fine, Lee and Lowe agree.

If you want to get started with a bit more structured, regimented approach, though, Lowe's got some advice for you: **Don't worry about how long you train for.** More important than your total workout time is the tension put on your muscles. In other words, worry about hitting a certain number of repetitions or sets, instead of working out for, say, an hour.


With that in mind, get started with this sample strategy:

During **weeks 1 through 4**, do mostly **compound movements**. These exercises incorporate multiple muscles at once (think squats, lunges, pushups, and chest presses) and offer the most benefits. Aim for 2 to 4 sets of 12 to 15 repetitions of each move. When 15 repetitions feels easy, increase your weight or resistance. (Periodically upping your workload, called progressive overload, is the key to results.)

Then, during **weeks 5 through 8**, alternate between **upper-and lower-body exercises**. Aim for 3 to 4 sets of 10 to 12 repetitions. Once 12 repetitions feels light, increase your resistance.

Next, during **weeks 9 through 12**, aim to **work your back, chest and core, legs and core, shoulders, and arms on separate days**. Complete 4 to 5 sets of 6 to 10 repetitions. When 10 repetitions feels light, up your resistance.

Progressing your approach in this way ensures you'll continue to see results, Lowe says. Of course, though, it's important to listen to your body (and to keep in mind that your muscles need about 48 hours of recovery time between intense workouts).

 **The bottom line:** You can do resistance training with your bodyweight, resistance bands, weights, or machines — and reap benefits like a more-toned bod, stronger bones, a healthier heart, and a boosted-mood.

---

JULIA SULLIVAN, CPT

Julia Sullivan, CPT, is a New York City-based writer, indoor rowing instructor, outdoor enthusiast, newbie powerlifter, and devoted cat mother. Her work has been published in Women's Health, SELF, Health, Huffington Post, and more. She holds a B.A. in journalism and gender studies from Arizona State University and a personal training certificate from the American Council on Exercise. When she's not covering the latest health and wellness trends, you can find her hitting the hiking trails, working toward her deadlift goal of 400 pounds, and forcefully hugging her cat, Jeeves, against his will.

---