

Why strength training is the key to weight loss

When you think of exercising for weight loss, what do you picture? Running? Cycling? Something that gets your heart beating hard and your body sweating heavily. Aerobic exercise has traditionally been associated with slimming down, while weight or resistance training – challenging your body to lift, push or pull its own weight, or that of barbells, kettlebells or dumbbells – was reserved for bodybuilders who were bulking up.

According to a survey published in 2022, around two thirds of people in England are meeting the national exercise guidelines of 150 minutes of aerobic activity every week, but this number drops dramatically when it comes to hitting the recommended target for strength training.

Resistance training can also be a really effective way of losing weight. If you are hunting for a long-term exercise regime to keep you trim, a growing body of research suggests that weight training is essential. One Harvard study even found that weight training is a more successful strategy for reducing belly fat in men than either moderate or vigorous aerobic activity.

All weight loss comes down to a calories in/calories out equation. Resistance training is a really effective way of losing weight because you're expending energy, which involves burning calories.

Lifting, pulling or pushing weight requires energy, which your body can either extract from stored fat or sugar, or from recently eaten calories. But there's more.

After your training session ends, your body continues to need calories for its recovery in order to repair and rebuild muscle. One study found that

the number of calories your body burns in order to do its basic, life-sustaining jobs can be raised for up to 48 hours after a resistance training session. Cardio workouts tend to have less prolonged impact on your metabolism, meaning you are not burning calories at a heightened rate for so long afterwards.

Nor do the benefits of resistance training end there. For long-term strength and weight management, increasing your muscle mass relative to your fat mass is key. When you lose weight by dieting alone, you don't only lose fat, you lose muscle too. Add weight training into the mix and you can help to preserve that muscle mass while losing the fat.

What's most likely to lead to weight loss is doing activity consistently over time, so the exercise should be the one you enjoy the most, because you're more likely to stick to it. That means resistance training offers an opportunity for people who really don't like cardio – the ones who hate sweating it out on a treadmill.