

Basic Training for Boomer Divas

Strength Training Guidelines for Fat Loss

Strength training is your “secret weapon” in your arsenal of fat loss/weight maintenance tricks! Although a 30-minute strength training routine might not utilize as many calories as a 30-minute walk or jog on a treadmill, the strength training routine may be more beneficial to you in the long run. In this lesson we’ll look at why strength training can help you lose fat and follow that with some general guidelines for strength training.

How can strength training help with fat loss if it doesn’t burn a ton of calories while you’re doing it? By strength training regularly, you build muscle. Muscle is active tissue, and consumes much more energy (i.e., calories) than fat. So, as you gain muscle, your resting metabolism increases and you burn more calories even at rest!

Another benefit of strength training is that it may help reduce abdominal obesity. Please understand I’m not suggesting you do endless crunches to melt subcutaneous (under the skin) fat on your belly--spot reducing doesn’t work. The stuff weight training may reduce is *intra-abdominal fat*, the fat underneath your abdominal wall encapsulating your organs. This type of fat has been associated with a number of negative health outcomes including cardiovascular disease and type II diabetes. Several studies have shown a reduction in this “inside the gut” fat with regular strength training. This is a reason to strength train not only for weight control, but also for health promotion and disease prevention!

So, what does an ideal strength training program for boomer women look like? We can take a lot of different approaches depending on who you are and what your goals are. Since we’re looking at fat loss in this lesson, I’ll approach my recommendations from that vantage point.

How often?

I suggest doing full body strength training 2-3 times per week. Yes, you can parse your strength training into body parts like body builders and do “split routines”. This type of a program may put you in the gym 4-5 days per week, training chest and triceps one day, back and biceps the following day, and so on. Nothing wrong with that, but most women I work with don’t have that much time!

What types of exercises?

My approach for busy women is to hit large muscle groups that require coordinated movements from several joints at a time. Think squats instead of a leg press machine, push ups instead of the chest press machine—more muscle gets used. Many women tell me they can’t do a push up. Yes! You can! Try a push up against a wall. As you get stronger, you can transition to a push up with your hands on a table, and from there you can transition to the floor on your knees. Once you’ve mastered the basics: squats, lunges, dead lifts, assisted pull ups, push ups, and rows, add in additional movements such as a biceps curl with your lunge, or a one armed shoulder press with your squat. When you do this, you’re coordinating more joints, using more muscle mass, and most

likely performing movements that are “functional” (i.e., they mimic actual movements you do during the day).

I’m not a fan of using machines for your whole workout, as they often eliminate the need for you to stabilize your torso. So, if you’re at the gym, make sure to visit the free weight area or use a pulley system for some exercises, and whenever possible, stand to do your exercises instead of sitting. Elastic tubing works well for home workouts. Just make sure to get heavy enough bands for larger muscle groups and to “graduate” to heavier bands as you get stronger.

In my boomer workouts here in San Jose, I have my clients training in “supersets” during which we pair two non-competing exercises together, and perform them back to back for 2-4 sets. For example we might do a chest press immediately followed by a squat. The chest muscles get a rest while the thighs and rear end work in the squat, and the thighs and rear end get a rest while the chest press is performed. We perform - or 4 superset pairs in each workout and we usually finish a full body strength training session in 20 minutes and have worked up quite a sweat!

How hard?

To stimulate muscle growth, you need to **overload the muscle** (so forget about curling soup cans, okay??). Not lifting heavy enough is one of the biggest mistakes I see when I go to the gym—especially with boomer women! Most of us are *not* that fragile!

Overloading the muscles with more stress than usual will elicit optimal results. If you don’t fatigue the muscle, you give it no reason to grow and adapt. When you’re doing your strength training routine, your muscles should be really fatigued by your last set. That said, if you can’t maintain proper form during an exercise, the weight may be too heavy! Work hard, but use common sense by increasing the weight you lift or push incrementally. Working to fatigue should be safe for just about every boomer woman, but some situations like fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis will need a gentler program.

Many women fear they will bulk up if they lift weights. Nope. It won’t happen with the program I’m laying out here, and we ladies just don’t have enough testosterone to build big, bulky muscles. Yes, there are women on the covers of muscle magazines that have huge muscles. Rest assured they spend *hours* in the gym, have an unusual diet and are on supplementation programs that regular gals like you and I wouldn’t do.

How many sets and reps?

There are lots of ways to set up your program. For starters, aim for 2-3 sets of 10-12 repetitions for a general strength training program. Once you’ve established a good baseline of strength, you can manipulate things to keep challenging your muscles. To change up your program, you can change the exercises you do, the number of set or repetitions you perform, or the weight/resistance you use.

Bonus strength training benefits for boomer women

Other benefits of strength training aside from assisting in fat loss are: increased bone density, improved muscle tone, improved mood, improved balance, better posture, decreased blood pressure.

The bottom line:

Strength has never been more important in a woman's life than **right now!** If you're in mid-life and you are not participating in a strength training routine, you are more likely to experience osteoporosis, falls and disability in your 70's and 80's.

If you're serious about aging gracefully and whittling away body fat, you **must** incorporate strength training into your workout routine in order to build muscle and boost your metabolism (and maybe even decrease intra-abdominal fat!).

Strength training just makes sense for all around health and well being for the boomer woman who wants to remain healthy, active and youthful in midlife!

Becky Williamson, M.S., is a Personal Fitness Trainer and Baby Boomer Fitness Expert based in San Jose, California. She is the creator of the "Fit and Fabulous FitCamp for Women over 40" in San Jose, and she blogs about all things "health and fitness" at her boomer fitness blog for women at <http://www.beckywilliamson.com>