

Step up your strength training

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(HealthDay)—Strength training is an essential part of a complete workout program. But whether you use free weights, machines or resistance bands, keep challenging your muscles by stepping up your

routine as you progress.

Training with eight to 10 exercises that target all [muscle groups](#) should be done two or three times a week. But never work the same muscles on consecutive days—your muscles need that [recovery time](#) to grow.

As you progress, you might opt for a split routine. That could mean working the upper body on Mondays and Thursdays and the lower body on Tuesdays and Fridays, for instance. How you set up the days is up to you, as long as every muscle group gets the rest it needs between sessions.

Once you can complete three sets of 12 to 15 repetitions of an exercise with excellent form—meaning you can just about complete your last rep of each set—it's time to add more weight. This might mean moving up one level in tension if you use resistance bands, adding a weight plate on a machine, or going from 5-pound dumbbells to 7.5-pound ones.

Whatever equipment you use, the increase should be heavy enough that you're back to being able to complete only eight reps per set, and possibly only two sets, not three.

Adding weight is just one way to up your game. You can also lengthen the time it takes you to release the lifted weight to work the muscle longer. Typically, this is twice the length of time it takes you to lift the weight.

If you haven't yet consulted a weight trainer, having a one-on-one session now will not only help you move to the next level safely, but also ensure that you're reaching four key goals: strength, power, [muscle development](#), and endurance.

More information: The American College of Sports Medicine has

advice for beginners and experienced lifters alike on [stepping up strength training](#).

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