

Strength training has a range of benefits for women—here are four ways to get into weights

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Picture a gym 10 years ago: The weights room was largely a male-dominated space, with women mostly doing cardio exercise. Fast-

forward to today and you're likely to see women of all ages and backgrounds confidently navigating weights equipment.

This is more than just anecdotal. According to data from the [Australian Sports Commission](#), the number of women [participating in weightlifting](#) (either competitively or not) grew nearly five-fold between 2016 and 2022.

Women are discovering what research has long shown: [strength](#) training offers benefits beyond sculpted muscles.

Health benefits

[Osteoporosis](#), a disease in which the bones become weak and brittle, affects more women than men. Strength training increases [bone density](#), a crucial factor for [preventing osteoporosis](#), especially for women negotiating menopause.

Strength training also improves [insulin sensitivity](#), which means your body gets better at using insulin to manage blood sugar levels, reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes. Regular strength training contributes to better [heart health](#) too.

There's a mental health boost as well. Strength training has been linked to reduced symptoms of [depression](#) and [anxiety](#).

Improved confidence and body image

Unlike some forms of exercise where progress can feel elusive, strength training offers clear and tangible measures of success. Each time you add more [weight](#) to a bar, you are reminded of your ability to meet your goals and [conquer challenges](#).

This sense of achievement doesn't just stay in the gym—it can change how women see themselves. A [recent study](#) found women who regularly lift weights often feel more empowered to make [positive changes](#) in their lives and feel ready to face life's challenges outside the gym.

Strength training also has the potential to positively impact [body image](#). In a world where women are often judged on appearance, lifting weights can shift the focus [to function](#).

Instead of worrying about the number on the scale or fitting into a certain dress size, women often come to appreciate their bodies for what they can do. "Am I lifting more than I could last month?" and "can I carry all my groceries in a single trip?" may become new measures of physical success.

Lifting weights can also be about challenging outdated ideas of how women "should" be. Qualitative [research](#) I conducted with colleagues found that, for many women, strength training becomes a powerful form of rebellion against unrealistic beauty standards. As one participant told us:

"I wanted something that would allow me to train that just didn't have anything to do with how I looked."

Society has long told women to be small, quiet and not take up space. But when a woman steps up to a barbell, she's pushing back against these outdated rules. One woman in our study said,

"We don't have to [...] look a certain way, or [...] be scared that we can lift heavier weights than some men. Why should we?"

This shift in mindset helps women see themselves differently. Instead of worrying about being objects for others to look at, they begin to see their

bodies as capable and strong. Another participant explained:

"Powerlifting changed my life. It made me see myself, or my body. My body wasn't my value, it was the vehicle that I was in to execute whatever it was that I was executing in life."

This newfound confidence often spills over into other areas of life. As one woman said,

"I love being a strong woman. It's like going against the grain, and it empowers me. When I'm physically strong, everything in the world seems lighter."

Feeling inspired? Here's how to get started

1. Take things slow

Begin with bodyweight exercises like squats, lunges and push-ups to build a foundation of strength. Once you're comfortable, add external weights, but keep them light at first. Focus on mastering compound movements, such as deadlifts, squats and overhead presses. These exercises engage multiple joints and muscle groups simultaneously, making your workouts more efficient.

2. Prioritize proper form

Always prioritize [proper form](#) over lifting heavier weights. Poor technique can lead to injuries, so learning the correct way to perform each exercise is crucial. To help with this, consider working with an exercise professional who can provide personalized guidance and ensure you're performing exercises correctly, at least initially.

3. Consistency is key

Like any fitness regimen, consistency is key. Two to three sessions a week are plenty for most women to see benefits. And don't be afraid to occupy space in the weights room—remember you belong there just as much as anyone else.

4. Find a community

Finally, join a community. There's nothing like being surrounded by a group of strong women to inspire and motivate you. Engaging with a supportive community can make your [strength-training](#) journey more enjoyable and rewarding, whether it's an in-person class or an online forum.

Are there any downsides?

Gym memberships can be expensive, especially for specialist weightlifting gyms. Home equipment is an option, but quality barbells and weightlifting equipment can come with a hefty price tag.

Also, for women juggling work and [family responsibilities](#), finding time to get to the gym two to three times per week can be challenging.

If you're concerned about getting too "bulky," it's very difficult for [women](#) to bulk up like male bodybuilders without pharmaceutical assistance.

The main risks come from poor technique or trying to lift too much too soon—issues that can be easily avoided with some guidance.

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