Lift Weights to Improve Your Mind

Can lifting weights actually keep your mind sharper and your body stronger? Few of us would argue that strength training will help improve your fitness and your ability to do everyday tasks. But, can it actually make your brain stronger?

According to Kris Jenkins, MU Extension Human Development specialist, “A new study by Canadian researchers has found that women who built muscle strength through biceps curls, leg lifts, squats and the like showed much greater improvement in mental focus, as well as the ability to make decisions and resolve conflicts, than women who did only balance and toning exercises.” The study published this month in the Archives of Internal Medicine, is a one year follow-up of 155 women ages 65 to 75 who participated in a 2007-2008 strength-training exercise program.

In the follow-up, women who lifted weights once a week showed more improvement than those who had started out lifting two times a week. The reason? Liu-Ambrose, the lead researcher, believes it’s because the once-weekly group found it easier than the twice-weekly group to maintain the same level of physical activity over time. “Those who start a once-weekly program are more likely to stick with it,” she says.

Regardless of whether they were in the once-weekly or the twice-weekly group, both showed a 15% improvement on their mental skills tests in comparison with the group that did only balance exercises and toning.

Added Benefits
Most people lose about ¼ pound of muscle each year starting in their late 30’s. This is because of aging, but also because of physical inactivity. Lifting weights helps build muscle and muscle burns more calories than fat; lowers blood sugar levels, thus reducing the risk of diabetes and heart disease; and increases bone density and that means a lower risk for osteoporosis and fractures

Challenges and Choices

All of us want to feel healthy and fit as we age. The reality is that it takes more effort and thought than it did when we were younger. MU Extension has an excellent resource that can help you establish healthy habits. Challenges and Choices: Fit for Life (GH6655) can be accessed online through this link: [http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=gh6655](http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=gh6655) The guide sheet has tips for healthy eating (both at home and in restaurants), a variety of exercise tips, some easy hints to increase your activity level by just changing your everyday habits and a final section on positive attitude and body image.

*Spanish translation provided by Kelly Loeb, MSW through Support of the Kansas Department on Aging.*