

Chapter Fifteen

Stronger for the Time of Our Lives

Strength training is an essential form of healthcare as you age because it is a unique type of exercise that causes measurable changes in your bodily tissues, changes that are beneficial to your overall health. Increasing your muscle and bone mass through strength training helps to prevent diseases of disuse, such as sarcopenia, osteopenia, osteoporosis, and osteoarthritis. Decreasing excess body fat by training and eating intelligently reduces the incidences of obesity and the diseases that stem from it, such as arteriosclerosis, diabetes, and strokes. The positive changes in your body's tissues as a result of strength training also increase your metabolic rate, aerobic capacity, beneficial cholesterol levels, and ability to control body temperature. The longer in life you perform strength exercises consistently, the stronger you will become relative to the person you would have been if you did not so challenge yourself. The stronger you become as you age, the longer you will enjoy the health benefits that strength training provides.

Beyond causing beneficial changes in the actual tissues of our bodies, systematic strength exercise also enhances our functional health. Functional health is the ability to do well all of the required and desired physical tasks of life in a manner that is satisfying to us and that does not result in the premature breakdown of our bodies. Ongoing strength training extends that period of time in our lives when we can do our best work, whatever that work is. If you are a teacher, it will afford you the opportunity to teach with a very high level of energy for a very long time. If you are a carpenter, it will extend your active career, giving you more time to build better structures. If you are a dancer, you will be able to dance more beautifully and more powerfully for more years than you could have without strength training. Doing well what you enjoy doing well for more years than you once thought possible is one of the highest forms of personal fulfillment.