

WANTED: Women in the Weight Room

I was at the gym the other day, pushing my post-pregnancy butt through a challenging weight routine, and I couldn't help but notice that I was the only woman in the weight room...again! Now, being the only woman in a male dominated environment means I never have to wait in line for equipment, as the age-old rule of "ladies first" seems to be respected nicely, but it always depresses my personal trainer heart to realize that women are still afraid to assert their right to utilize a space that is as much theirs as anyone else's. I fully understand (remember "post pregnancy") that when we are not feeling our best the weight room can feel daunting and downright frightening, but what we often fail to remember is that taking the necessary steps to reclaim our health feels incredibly powerful. I have to believe, after many years of working with female clients, that the scarcity of women in the weight room has a lot to do with simply not knowing what to do and a fear of injury (even if it is just our pride that gets injured). Since "knowledge is power", it is my intent here to provide you with a little insight as to why weight training is so important and to provide you with a few tips that may make that weight room feel just a little less scary. First and foremost, it is important, and hopefully motivating, to understand that adding muscle to your body increases your body's ability to burn calories. Weight training increases your metabolism. Secondly, since muscle is metabolically active tissue, it can be tough for your body to maintain during times of stress. This means when your body is being challenged by a change in your exercise program or a drop in calories, which are both forms of stress to you physically, your body would much rather give up muscle tissue than fat tissue because muscle demands more calories than fat to stay on the body. Muscle is "high maintenance", fat is not. For this reason, if someone is trying to lose fat, but fails to weight train, they will inevitably lose some muscle tissue. When muscle tissue is lost, the metabolism slows (less calories are burned), which ultimately promotes fat storage rather than fat loss. If that isn't enough reason for you to drop this article and run to the weight room, consider that weight training also helps to increase bone density, prevent injury, improve balance, decrease the risks of heart disease, improve posture and increase energy. Weight training does not have to be complicated. Go back to basics and start slow. If you are de-conditioned, one of the biggest mistakes you can make when it comes to weight training is to do too much too soon. The key to any effective fitness program is "progression", small challenges to your routine to keep you working harder than you did the week before. If you weren't doing anything last week, just adding one or two weight training sessions this week is all you need to ignite muscles that have been lying dormant for awhile. Start with just a couple sets of each exercise you choose and work within the 12-15 rep range. Work with your own bodyweight at first and emphasize compound movements, movements that involve several muscle groups like squats, lunges and push-ups. As things start to get easier, challenge your program by adding another set, bringing in the weights, and eventually adding a few more exercises. If you think back on all of the skills you have acquired during the course of your life, and how you acquired them, it is my guess that many, if not most of those skills were learned by having someone show you the ropes. Why should fitness be any different? The great thing about living in the information age is that there is an endless supply of resources at your fingertips to help you build your confidence in the weight room. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of books, videos, and magazines that provide examples of strength training exercises, and how to execute them properly to avoid injury. Health clubs and personal training studios alike offer an array of classes and personal training services that will educate and inspire you to try different strength training techniques. Take some initiative to help build your confidence and reclaim your health by asking for the help you need. I look forward to seeing you in the weight room!