Chances are, if you're reading this, you're a regular gym-goer. And any regular gym-goer knows that the weight room is a typically male-dominated zone – sweat, iron and testosterone seem to go hand-in-hand, right?

Okay, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe there are other places in this world where women tend towards the heavy lifting and the dudes bro out on the cross-trainer. But until I discover this magical place, I'll just carry on believing that weight-lifting is, in general, pretty much a 'guy' thing.

So why don't more women lift weights? Well, let's consider social conditioning as a deterrent to certain types of physical conditioning. The media requires women to be small. Women that are exposed to us through popular culture are, more often than not, celebrated for their thinness. But there's plenty of space for women in pop culture, so why are women encouraged to take up as little physical space as possible? The more ribs jutting out, the better. Many women shy away from gaining muscle through fear that muscle will make them bigger, heavier, and therefore 'unattractive'. Little wonder that the idea of lifting heavy things and gaining muscle mass is a pretty scary concept for your average Joanne.

Yes, I'm a feminist. You'd never tell.

I'm also a bit of a lifting junkie. You'd be hard pressed to guess that, too. Several men at the gym I go to have asked me what my discipline is – am I a runner, a swimmer, a dancer? The answer to all those things is no. I follow the same weight-training regime as my boyfriend, and I do it because I love it.

I do it because feeling strong is empowering. It's a great stress reliever. I feel fitter and in better shape now than I ever did when I'd be happier to lose 10kg than place it in my hand and curl it. And would you believe it – I'm still a size eight. No drastic diet, no torturous hours spent beating the treadmill like a rabid hamster. Because those cultural myths aren't true. Here's a short guide to the science behind lifting, and why women should feel free to waltz up to the squat rack and own it.

1. You will still slim down by adding weight to your routine.

Many women believe that lifting heavy is reserved for men that want to look like the Incredible Hulk. Trust me, girls, you're not going to turn scary and green just because you're stepping it up from the 5lb dumbbells. The first reason lifting heavy weights won't make you don tights, rip sleeves, and become the next Incredible...
Incredible Hulk is that you don't have the testosterone levels to pack on tons of mass. It's time for some simple biology: men have testicles. Therefore, they have more testosterone, a.k.a the primary muscle-building hormone. They don't call it the 'Hercules hormone' for naught. Since women have significantly less testosterone surging through their veins, they cannot put on muscle mass at the same rate, or to the same degree, as men can. Well … it is possible, but professional bodybuilding involves a dramatic lifestyle change and a lot of hard work.

2. You'll find it rewarding!

It's nice to see progress, right? It's nice, when you're 'slimming down', to step on the scales and see the numbers gradually drop, week by week. Now imagine translating that into something more awesome. There is nowhere to go but forward with a good training regime. And that's pure satisfaction.

4. You'll have stronger bones.

There's been an absolute ton of research into why exercise (particularly weightlifting) is beneficial for bone density. There are three key aspects of exercise that have positive effects here – strain magnitude, strain rate, and strain frequency. In layman's terms: increases in bone density can be had in as little as 12 to 20 minutes of weight-bearing exercise, three days a week. True story, bro.

5. You'll develop a higher metabolism.

Strenuous weight-training offers a higher metabolic rate: put simply, the tiny muscular tears throughout the body that are caused by the excess weight means the body will work harder to repair those tiny tears, thus increasing your overall calorie requirements. Put it this way – if you started lifting and didn't change your diet at all, you'd be creating a marginal calorie deficit because your body will need more energy. The science is simple; the raise in metabolism is pretty awesome.

6. You'll see greater muscle definition.

Maybe it's a no-brainer, but lifting heavier weights more often means your muscles will increase your overall muscle definition. You're in control of what you want to tighten up, build up, slim down … of course, a regime that works your whole body over the course of a week is the best option, but if you're looking to tighten your butt or get rid of those bingo wings, this is the way to go. In order to achieve this, though, you've got to challenge your muscles with heavier curls, squats and presses. This forces your muscles to grow so they can cope with what you're pushing them to do!

So, ladies, if you're not seeing results from twice-weekly pilates classes and the occasional jaunt on the treadmill, it's time raise the bar with your workouts. Literally.

I promise it'll be the most rewarding change you'll ever make to your fitness!

References


5 Reasons to Eat Your Greens

February 5, 2014

How to Maintain Your Gains (and Losses)

December 18, 2013
So why don't more women lift weights? Well, let's consider social conditioning as a deterrent to certain types of physical conditioning. The media requires women to be small. Women that are exposed to us through popular culture are, more often than not, celebrated for their thinness. But there's plenty of space for women in pop culture, so why are women encouraged to take up as little physical space as possible? The more ribs jutting out, the better. Because those cultural myths aren't true.

Here's a short guide to the science behind lifting, and why women should feel free to waltz up to the squat rack and own it. You will still slim down by adding weight to your routine. Many women believe that lifting heavy is reserved for men that want to look like the Incredible Hulk. Principles for the Ultimate Beginners Guide for Weightlifting. 1. Train Movements, Not Muscles. The most crippling problem for beginners is isolating each muscle group rather than training compound, multi-joint movements. This is majoring in the minors and a sure-fire way to be small, weak, and injury prone. Strength training with basic movement patterns is the best way to develop a strong strength base. As such you have limited time and energy to dedicate to training and picking the right exercises is key to getting results in the gym. Eric's Recommendation: Focus on three movement patterns per workout, aiming to add weight to the bar during each workout. Plan all movements patterns equally for balanced training. 2. Stick to the basics. Weightlifting involves using one's hands to raise a bar with metal weights, with the goal of increasing one's muscular abilities. The three major types of lifts in weightlifting, or powerlifting, competitions are the squat, the bench press, and the dead lift. It is a huge topic to discuss it in short, so...