It’s good to be strong. And it’s even better to know that you can always improve your strength through training. That’s important because people begin losing muscle mass at age 30. By age 70, you’ll have lost approximately 25 percent of the muscle mass you had at age 30. The only way to prevent age-related muscle wasting (sarcopenia) is to use your muscles.

Avoiding loss of your muscle mass will make everyday actions—such as walking up stairs, getting up from the floor, and standing up from a seated position—easier and more comfortable to do. In fact, when you feel stiff, are overweight, or have joint problems, strength training is especially important.

**MYTH:** Strength training decreases flexibility.

**FACT:** Increasing your muscle mass and strength will not reduce flexibility. Sometimes when starting a strength-training program, people become aware of decreased range of motion. This is most likely due to prior inactivity. If you’re obese, extra adipose tissue may be the cause of your decreased range of motion. Doing resistance exercises can help improve that.

**MYTH:** If I have arthritis, I can’t exercise.

**FACT:** Strength training helps support the joints affected by arthritis. Being consistent with your workout can increase muscle strength and decrease the load on the joints, which can cut down on pain and inflammation. Performing isometric exercises (more on those later) can help build strength when there is inflammation.

**MYTH:** Faster is better.

**FACT:** Form and control are more important than speed. It’s OK to move quickly and in rapid succession through strength moves, but never compromise form and always control the movement. Your “fast” may be slower than someone else’s, and that’s fine. Go at your own pace.
The following group of exercises features three strength training principles—

**Isometric exercise** includes staying in a static position. The joint angle and muscle length do not change. **Super-slow strength training** uses very slow speeds of lifting and lowering, usually 10 seconds of lifting and 10 seconds of lowering.

**Power training** is a combination of both strength and speed, and it’s incredibly useful for everyday life. Imagine you see an elderly woman crossing the road at an intersection and she is not able to cross before the light changes. She may have the strength to cross the street, but not the power to cross in the allotted time. As we age, power is lost more quickly than strength. One way to retain or gain power is to increase the speed during the exercise.

**Safety Note**

Talk to your doctor before making any big changes to your exercise plan.

**Supplies you’ll need for these moves:** handheld weights, such as a kettlebell, dumbbells, heavy book, or plastic bottles of water.

---

**KETTLEBELL SWINGS**

**Strengthens thighs, buttocks, abdomen, and upper arms**

A Use a kettlebell, a dumbbell, or other heavy object (aim for something that weighs 5 to 15 pounds, depending on your strength). Start in a squat position with the kettlebell between your legs. Keep your chin up; do not look down at the floor. Tighten your abdominal muscles. 

B Rise up from the squat to standing, extending your arms and lifting the kettlebell to shoulder height. Return to the squat position and repeat.

**REPETITIONS:** 10–15

---

**SQUAT JACKS**

**Strengthens thighs, buttocks, and abdomen**

A Start in a squat position with your feet together, your elbows bent, and your palms touching in front of your chest. Keep your chin up and tighten your abdominal muscles. 

B Jump your feet out into a wide squat and then jump them back together. Repeat. Stay in a squat and keep your back flat during the entire exercise.

**REPETITIONS:** 10–15

---

**OVERHEAD PRESS**

**Strengthens shoulders, arms, and chest**

A Using hand weights (5 to 25 pounds, depending on your strength), start with your elbows bent out to the sides with the weights at about shoulder height. Tighten your abdominal muscles and keep your knees slightly bent. 

B Lift the hand weights overhead in a super slow motion to a count of 10, then slowly lower them to starting position to a count of 10. Repeat.

**REPETITIONS:** 10–15
PLYOMETRIC LUNGE
Strengthens thighs, buttocks, and abdomen
A Start in a lunge position with one leg bent at the knee in front of you and the opposite arm directed forward. Your other leg and opposite arm should extend behind. Lunge as low to the ground as you comfortably can, leaning forward slightly with your spine straight. B Quickly, with a little hop, switch your back leg and arm into a forward lunge position. Repeat.
REPETITIONS: 10–15

SQUAT WITH OUTER LEG RAISE
Strengthens inner and outer thighs, buttocks, abdomen, and shoulders
A Start in a squat position with your feet hip width apart and your arms at your sides. If desired, hold hand weights. Tighten your abdominal muscles. B Stand up, raising your right leg out to the side while standing on the left leg. As you do so, raise your arms to form a T. Return to the squat position and repeat with your left leg.
REPETITIONS: 15 per leg

PLIÉ SQUAT
Strengthens thighs, buttocks, and abdomen
Assume a squat position with your feet widely spaced and your knees turned out toward your big toes (your knees should not face forward or buckle inward). Press your palms together at chest height, tighten your abdominal muscles, and keep your spine straight.
REPETITIONS: Hold the position for 30 seconds, working up to 2 minutes.

POWER PUSH-UP
Strengthens shoulders, upper arms, and core
A Start with your knees on the floor, your heels raised. Support your torso on your extended arms, with your palms shoulder width apart. Tighten your abdominal muscles. B Bend your elbows out to the side and lower your chest to the floor slowly, to a count of 10, keeping your spine straight. Push up quickly and repeat.
REPETITIONS: 10

SIDE PLANK
Strengthens hips and abdomen
A Lay on your right side, knees bent at 90 degrees with your legs behind you. Rise up onto your right forearm. B Lift your hips off the floor, keeping your abdominal muscles engaged. Support your body on your knee and forearm. Hold as directed, below. Switch to the other side and repeat.
REPETITIONS: Hold this position for 30 seconds, working up to 2 minutes per side.

Kirsten C. Ward, MS, RCEP, CDE, is an exercise physiologist, certified diabetes educator, and certified health coach. She has traveled nationally and internationally, presenting on diabetes and physical activity, and enjoys practicing what she preaches by running, hiking, and doing yoga. Find her at healthcoachboston.com.