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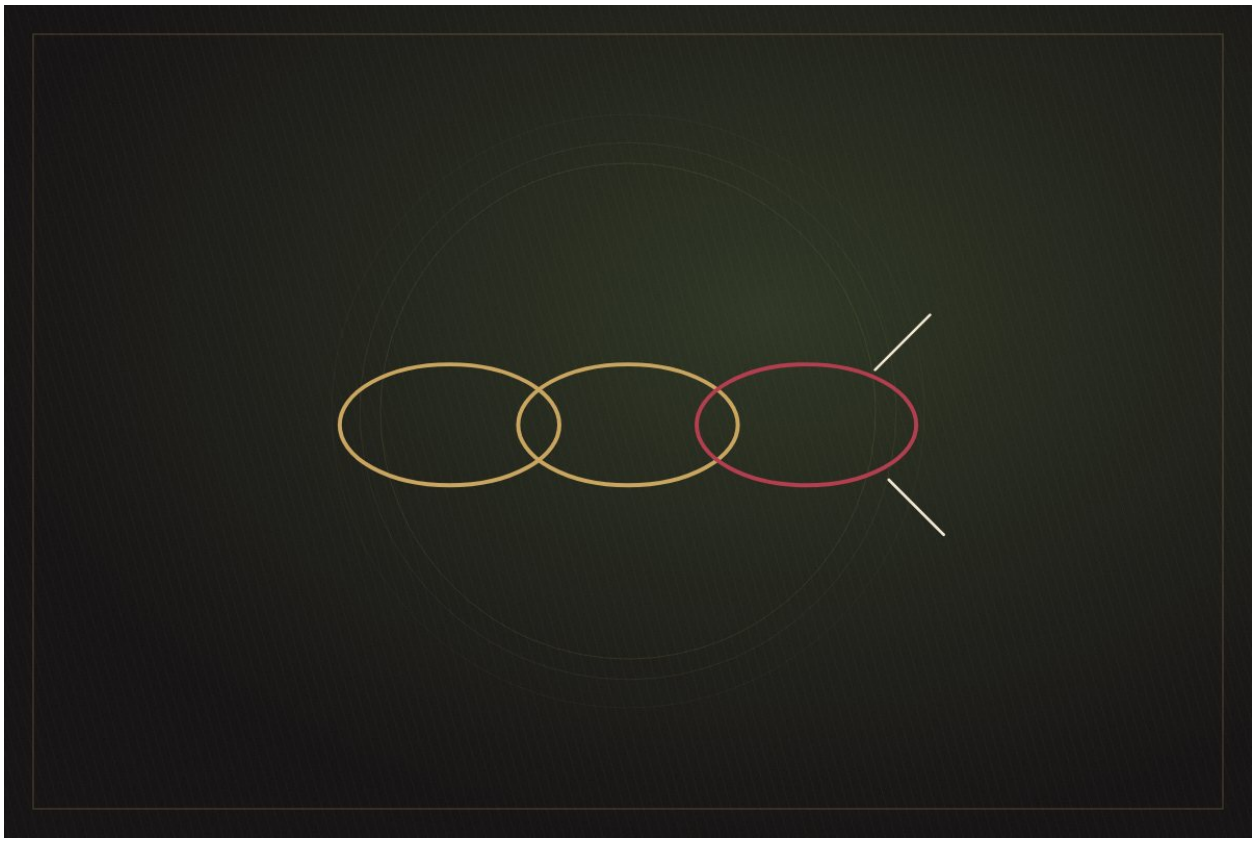
Body

Strength training: the 30 to 60 minutes a week that many people forget

What a meta-analysis of 16 studies found about muscles, the heart and longevity, and how to start without a gym

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Translated from the Albanian original by the editors.



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The World Health Organization guidelines for adults have two parts. The first, better known, is aerobic activity: brisk walking, running, cycling. The second, often forgotten, is muscle strengthening, at least two days a week, working the major muscle groups.

What the meta-analysis found

In 2022 a group of Japanese researchers led by Haruki Momma pooled the results of 16 observational studies, with participants aged 18 to 97, followed for up to 25 years. They compared people who did strength exercises with those who did not.

- Strength exercises were associated with about **10 to 17 per cent lower risk** of death from all causes, of heart disease and of cancer overall.
- The greatest benefit was seen at about **30–60 minutes a week**. For larger amounts, the evidence showed no clear additional benefit.
- When strength exercises were combined with aerobic activity, the association was even stronger: about 40 per cent lower risk of death from all causes.

The limits

All the studies were observational, not clinical trials; so they show association, not necessarily cause. The amount of exercise was reported by the participants themselves, most studies were from the United States, and few studies were pooled for each outcome. But the direction of the evidence matches what we know about the importance of muscle, especially with age.

> *Muscles are not only for looks. They are what keeps you on your feet, lifts you from the chair and protects you when you fall.*

Why muscles matter

After middle age, muscle mass and strength decline gradually if they are not exercised. This makes it harder to climb stairs, carry bags and keep one's balance. Strength exercises slow this decline at any age, and it is never too late to start.

A starter programme without equipment

Twice a week, about 20–30 minutes, with a rest day in between:

1. **Chair stands** without using your hands: 2–3 sets of 8–12 repetitions.
2. **Wall or table push-ups**, for the arms and chest: 2–3 sets of 8–12.
3. **Stair climbing** or step-ups onto a stable step: 2–3 sets of 10 for each leg.
4. **Plank** with knees on the floor: 3 holds of 20–30 seconds.

When the exercises become easy, add repetitions, slow the movement down or use small weights, such as water bottles. If you have heart disease, joint pain or any other health condition, talk to your doctor or physiotherapist first.

Sources

Momma, H., Kawakami, R., Honda, T. & Sawada, S. S. (2022). Muscle-strengthening activities are associated with lower risk and mortality in major non-communicable diseases: A systematic review and meta-analysis of cohort studies. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 56(13), 755–763. doi:10.1136/bjsports-2021-105061

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