WHAT WE'RE READING...

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NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.

4 Ways to Tailor Your Strength Training to Meet Your Goals

In the realm of exercise physiology, there's no shortage of research examining the effects of strength and resistance training. The difficult part for athletes and active-minded individuals is figuring out how to implement this type of training to achieve the best results. From heavy lifting at the gym to resistance bands at studio classes to body-weight exercises in your living room, there are many approaches to consider. The good news is that all of these can be effective when done right.

The most important factor that should guide you in choosing exactly how to approach strength training should be your long-term goals. Are you interested in shedding a few pounds? Have you encountered a nagging injury you want to address? Or do you simply want to improve running or cycling performance? Strength training can help with all of these things.

We've rounded up some of the most important research on the subject so you can tailor your strength-training sessions to suit your goals:

1. Lift lighter weights for more reps to lose weight.

If you're aiming to lose a few pounds, strength training can play a major role in getting you to your optimal weight. While there are many valid approaches to strength work, recent research suggests that resistance-training programs that focus on muscular endurance contribute more to weight loss. This means that rather than lifting a very heavy weight a few times, you're better off lifting a lighter weight more times. This doesn't make the exercise easier—the last repetition should still feel difficult—it just means it takes longer to reach the point of fatigue.

2. Add explosive leg moves to boost running performance.

Research suggests that strength training, particularly when it is focused on the leg muscles, can actually improve running performance. For instance, one study had participants do 4 sets of 4 half squats with a barbell, 3 times per week for 8 weeks. They found that running economy improved significantly, making runners more efficient. Participants were also able to run 21% longer before reaching the point of exhaustion. What's more, Australian researchers found that an explosive lifting regimen done 3 times a week that included exercises such as hamstring curls, leg presses, skipping and bounding offered a significant boost to running economy.

Put simply, if you're hoping to improve running performance, be sure to include some explosive power moves in your strength training in order to increase the amount of force by which you can push off the ground with each step.

3. Combine explosive exercises with heavy resistance to boost cycling performance.

As they have with running, studies have shown that explosive strength training can improve cycling performance. Try moves like box jumps and jump squats to train the body to recruit fast-twitch muscles more effectively. This not only comes in handy for increasing your speed on the bike, but it also helps develop muscle fibers that are relied upon in the later stages of long endurance events.

Other research has revealed that heavy resistance training conducted 3 days a week for 10 weeks in conjunction with training on the bike can improve a cyclist's time to exhaustion—in this case from 71 minutes to 85 minutes.

4. Strengthen your weaknesses to prevent injury.

Not only can strength work contribute to weight loss and better performance, but it can also assist in keeping you healthy over the long haul. Strength training has long been cited as one of the best ways to address muscle imbalances that can lead to a wide range of sports injuries. It also increases bone strength, which has a protective effect particularly during high-impact activities like running. By identifying any existing weaknesses and having those deficits guide your strength-training program, you're more likely to skirt injuries down the road.

5. Recover

Nutrition is the key to complete each of these workout regimes. Understanding your goals, metabolic profile and calories spent and then recovering with the right blend of macro nutrients and supplements for specific goals immediate following a workout can mean the difference between failure and success. It is best to drink a nutrient dense Recovery Shake tailored to calories spent and goals set.