

Free weights or machines?

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(HealthDay)—Resistance or strength training isn't just for bodybuilders—it's for everyone, and it's essential to combat the natural tendency to lose muscle mass with age.

It also helps prevent [bone loss](#) and lowers body fat, [blood pressure](#) and cholesterol.

You can strengthen muscles with everything from resistance bands to heavy soup cans. But most people choose between machines or free weights, which include dumbbells, barbells and [weight](#) cuffs that go on wrists and ankles. Factors influencing your decision include personal preference, your current fitness level and your training goals, as well as what equipment is most available to you.

If you're new to [strength training](#) (or exercise in general), machines found at the gym are often considered the safer choice. Each one typically targets one muscle group at a time. You might like having the machine guide your range of motion, and you can increase the resistance with the touch of a lever or by moving a pin. You may need to adjust the seat or back position to accommodate your height. All-in-one weight machines with different stations are available for the home, and some styles are very compact.

While some people start with light free weights, others move to weights as they get stronger. They're safe as long as you use proper technique. That takes practice and often more instruction than machines, so you might want assistance from a fitness trainer to get you started.

Remember to be cautious when moving around [heavy weights](#). A good gym will have a wide variety of bars and plates to accommodate your increasing strength. For home use, a starter set of free weights is often affordable, and you can add to it as you progress.

If money is an issue, try exercises that use your own body weight as resistance, like chin-ups and push-ups.

Remember that proper form and technique are more important than

what equipment you use. Always work large muscle groups first, then move to smaller ones. Train at least two days a week, but always with one or two days off between workouts.

More information: The University of Delaware has details on [choosing the best weight-training system](#) for you.

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