

Weight-Training and Weight-Lifting Safety

Be safe

Lifting weights, whether you do it for fun, training for sports or for competition, can cause serious injury or even death. You can lift weights more safely by following these basic guidelines.

Find a teacher

Find a teacher who can help you learn how to do the exercises correctly. Good technique is one of the most important ways to avoid injury. Some high-school coaches or athletic trainers can help you. If a college is located in your town, the weight coach for the varsity athletic teams may be able to give you advice or recommend another teacher. The National Strength and Conditioning Association (telephone: 402-472-3000) may also be able to recommend a qualified coach in your area. Advice from people who have never learned good technique themselves, such as parents, friends, coaches or other weight lifters, may not be correct. Books can help, but nothing beats personal coaching.

Set goals

With your teacher's help, decide on the goals of your weight-training program. The goals of your training program will depend on your age, physical maturity and the reason you are lifting weights. You need to consider which exercises you will use, how often you will do each exercise, what weight you will start with and when you will increase this weight.

Wait until you're ready

Wait until your body has matured enough before you try the major lifts. The major lifts, performed with barbells, include the clean and jerk, the power clean, the snatch, the squat, the dead lift, and the bench, incline and overhead presses. These exercises are likely to cause injury if you lift heavy weights without proper technique and the help of spotters. The average age when the body is mature enough for these exercises is 15 years, but this age varies among individuals.

Warm up; cool down

Warm up and cool down for each session. Warm-up before the weight-lifting session should include stretching exercises, calisthenics and jogging. When you begin each lifting exercise, use small amounts of weight at first and then progress to heavier weights. During your cool-down after the session, stretching is again important.

DOs

- Do use spotters when you try the major lifts.
- Do keep your back straight when lifting.
- Do use proper lifting technique when moving weights around the room.
- Do wear shoes with good traction.
- Do make sure the equipment you use is in good condition.

DON'Ts

- Don't hyperventilate (breathe in and out fast) or hold your breath when you lift heavy weights. You may faint and lose control of the weights. Breathe out when you lift.
- Don't continue lifting if you feel pain. Stop the painful exercise for a few days or try it with less weight.
- Don't exercise any set of muscles more than three times a week.
- Don't "cheat" on your technique in order to lift heavy weights.
- Don't lift heavy weights without spotters.
- Don't lift more than you know you can lift safely.

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.



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