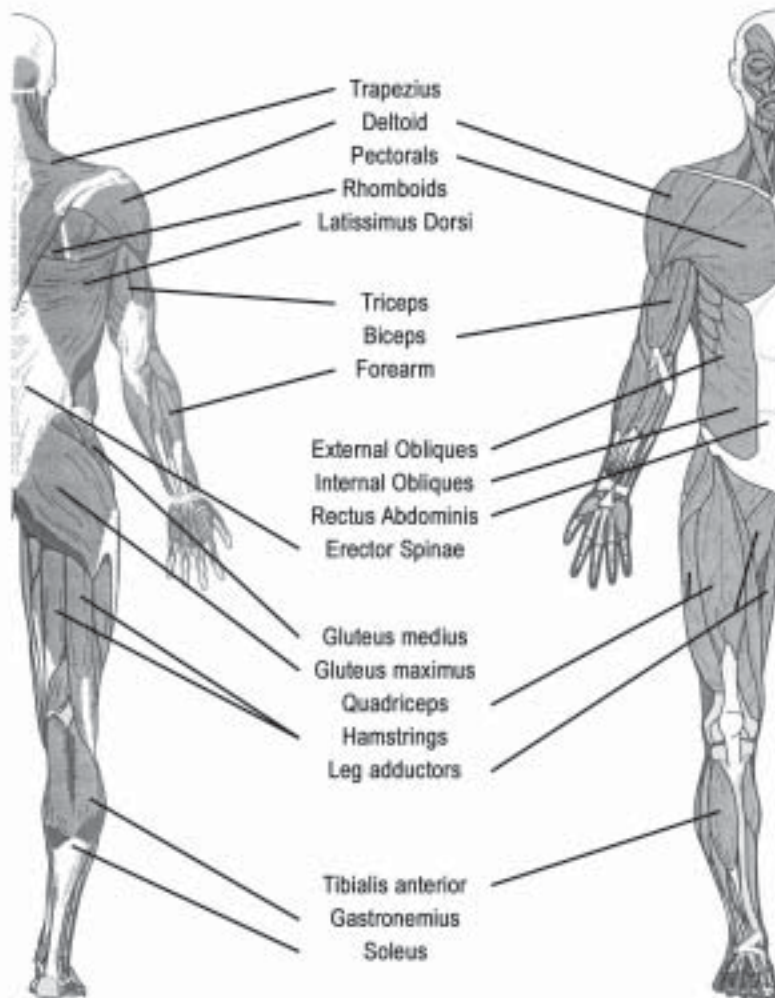


Lift Weights

There are 650 muscles in your body: however, you do not need to learn all of them. Consider, for instance, the inferior retinaculum of the long extensor of your big toe. You don't need to learn that one. In fact, I don't even know that one—I had to look it up in an anatomy book. If you have any desire to learn about that muscle apply to medical school.

Meanwhile, below, there are highlighted about 20 or so muscles that any conscientious exerciser should know. What's the point? For one thing, you won't need an interpreter when a trainer, video instructor, or fellow gym member says, "Let's do lats and pecs today." Before you know it, you'll be saying stuff like that, too. And you'll sound really impressive—like wine aficionados who say, "This Chardonnay has a superior bouquet."

But more important, if you can name your major muscles and understand how each one operates, you'll probably get better results from your workout program. You'll understand, for instance, how certain exercises can help you prevent lower back pain. You'll understand why you should do several different shoulder exercises, rather than just one. And you'll be sure to perform your biceps exercises properly; if you know where your biceps are, you'll realize exactly where you should feel the tension. With many weight-training exercises, it's easy to emphasize the wrong muscle if you don't understand the purpose of the move. If you simply hop on a machine and pull some lever without knowing which muscle to focus on, you may be cheating yourself out of a good workout.



MAYBE YOU'VE NEVER considered yourself the weight-lifting type. Maybe you suspect that the size of one's muscles is inversely proportional to the size of one's brain. Maybe, when you see a hulking guy on the street, you think, "He may be able to bench press a mini-van, but I have a degree in French literature." The truth is weight lifting is an incredibly smart thing to do. It's not just a form of narcissism, and it's not just for body builders. Heck, these days even 80-year olds are pumping iron. People who start weight training regularly will tell you how much more fit, powerful, and energetic they feel. There is plenty of good, solid evidence that strength training will transform you into a healthier human being. Hopefully, at least one of the following reasons will get you to hoist a little iron.

Stay strong for everyday life

People who don't exercise lose 30 to 40 percent of their strength by age 65. By age 74, more than one-fourth of American men and two-thirds of American women can't lift an object heavier than 10 pounds, like a small dog or a loaded garbage bag. These changes are not the normal consequences of aging. They're a result of neglect—of experiencing life from your La-Z-Boy recliner and the front seat of your Winnebago. If you don't use your muscles, they simply waste away. This gradual slide toward wimpiness can begin as early as your mid-twenties. So if the heaviest thing that you've been lifting lately is a can of beer, it's time to build enough brawn to get along in the real world.

Keep your bones healthy

Roughly 25 million Americans have osteoporosis, a disease of severe bone loss that causes 1.5 million fractures a year, mostly of the back, hip, and wrist. Many of these fractures lead to fatal complications. Around age 35, most people begin to lose about 0.5 to 1 percent of their bone each year. Strong muscles and strong bones go hand in hand. The more weight you can lift, the more stress you can put on your bones; this stress is what stimulates them. If you never tax your bones, they have no incentive to stay strong.

Look better, but not necessarily bigger

Aerobic exercise burns lots of calories, but weight lifting firms, lifts, builds, and shapes your muscles. In the workout world, there's no such thing as spot reducing—that is, selectively zapping fat off a particular part of your body. But you can pick problem areas, such as your butt or your arms, and reshape them through weight training. And if you have wide hips or a thick middle, you can bring your body more into proportion by doing exercises that broaden your shoulders and back.

Prevent injuries

When your muscles are strong, you're also less injury prone. You are less likely to step off a curb and twist your ankle. Plus, you have a better sense of balance and surefootedness, so you're less apt to take a tumble during a weekend game of touch football.

Lose fat

You may burn more calories in the short term by doing aerobic exercise than by lifting weights, but it's important to do both, because the more muscle you have, the more calories your body uses in the course of a day (and often those calories will come from your body's fat stores). What's more, a weight-loss program can actually cause you to lose muscle if you don't stimulate new muscle growth.