

MORE THAN BIG MUSCLES

By Jeffrey Kinnunen, MS, Exercise Physiologist

A healthy diet and regular exercise are essential to maintaining your health. However, when most people experience health problems, they usually don't consider that their fitness level may be responsible. There are four components of health-related fitness: muscular fitness, cardiovascular endurance, flexibility, and body composition. All of the components of health-related fitness contribute maintaining your health.

Muscular fitness is often dismissed as something that's only important for athletes. However, poor muscular fitness contributes to some types of chronic pain, risk of certain injuries, and a decline in the ability to perform normal activities of daily living as we age. Consequently, muscular fitness becomes more important as we get older, and it's never too late to start. Improving muscular fitness can help you improve or maintain the following:

- Bone mass, which relates to osteoporosis
- Glucose tolerance, which relates to type 2 diabetes
- Integrity of muscles and tendons, which relates to low-back pain and the risk of injury
- Body composition, which relates to weight management

Muscular fitness can be subdivided into two categories, muscular strength and muscular endurance. Muscular strength refers to the ability of a muscle to exert force. , Muscular endurance refers to the ability to perform successive exertions. Ideal muscular fitness levels are higher than many people would think. For example, according to the guidelines of the American College of Sports Medicine, a 69-year-old man with good upper body muscular endurance should be able to perform 10 standard push-ups without rest.

Improvements in muscular fitness occur gradually with consistent resistance training. The best way to begin a resistance-training program is to seek out a qualified fitness professional or health care provider who can work with you. And remember, you should always consult your physician before beginning an exercise program.