

# WHY GYM USERS ARE DEMANDING MORE STRENGTH TRAINING OPTIONS

BY RUBEN MEJIA

As 2023 gets underway, we're seeing an emerging theme that began during the pandemic. All across the country, people in all walks of life are becoming increasingly interested in strength workouts, whether on their own or in addition to traditional cardio. At SportsArt, we began seeing this trend take hold in the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic—once people realized that lockdowns would be longer than expected, they discovered that they could easily replace their in-person cardio workouts at home or outside. In fact, they were looking for reasons to get out of the house!

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**H**owever, people faced a much bigger challenge finding a substitution for the strength training that they found in their gyms. People are now returning to their pre-COVID routines and heading back to the gym for their workout regimens, but they're hanging onto the cardio-enhancing strength routines they developed alongside their running or cycling. That change is leading us to see a growing emphasis on strength training. These trends don't just apply to some workout spaces, either. We're seeing this shift toward strength training interest in university recreation centers, health clubs, multi-family housing







unit workout spaces, and beyond. From the casual exerciser getting into better shape to the committed athlete, strength workouts on dedicated strength equipment have become a staple.

The good news about this trend is that the continued integration of strength training is making people healthier, both physically and mentally. For instance, one 2020 study by Australian researchers published by the National Library of Medicine sought to determine the connection between regular physical activity and the prevention or treatment of depression. The study found that people who completed twice the recommended amount of physical activity were half as likely to have depression compared to those who were inactive, and that integrating strength training into an existing workout yielded even more positive results. "Our study advocates that combining strength training with aerobic activities like jogging or cycling is likely to be the best thing for your mental

health," researcher Jason Bennie said in an interview about the study. "If you added in one session of strength training a week, there was a decline in the prevalence of depression. It didn't really matter whether you did one versus three sessions—small to moderate increases are likely to be beneficial for improved mental health." Bennie told the interviewer that, at the time, the "vast majority of the population is doing no strength training," which he saw as an issue. "If you combine them both together," he said, "it's even better." Fortunately for all of us working toward supporting a healthier population, people are starting to take notice.

There's a reason some fitness experts refer to strength and resistance training as "the fountain of youth." This exercise modality doesn't just make people more fit; it helps train bodies and minds to perform at a higher level. This type of training helps maintain a healthy balance of hormones in the body. Those hormones, especially during stressful times, are greatly impactful to maintaining one's

cognitive abilities to focus and increase productivity. Strength and resistance training helps balance overall levels of cortisol, the hormone that balances stress. This balance is extremely important. Out-of-balance cortisol levels can decrease metabolism and increase inflammation in the body, decreasing a person's ability to focus and increasing the feeling known as brain fog. Cortisol touches every other system in the body, controlling blood-sugar levels, regulating blood pressure, affecting sleep quality, assisting in memory-making, and aiding in fetal health during pregnancy.

These widespread benefits help explain why this newfound focus on strength training has grown so rapidly among people in all walks of life. Students, for instance, are going through an extremely stressful part of their lives amid a renewed push for attention being paid to mental health. As they deal with school, interpersonal, work, and family stressors that are new to many of these young adults, strength training opportunities in recreation centers

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represent a rare combination of mental and physical self-care. In a very real way, strength workouts are helping students become healthier while balancing their brains to take on the tasks of the day.

Similarly, strength training can provide benefits for busy parents. While cardio is still a beneficial workout, running or biking can take hours. But parents who may only have small amounts of time available can find just thirty to sixty minutes in their week to participate in strength training, they can improve mental focus, recharge their bodies, boost their metabolism, and even improve their mental health.

There was an era not too long ago when workouts were boiled down to a simple line of thinking: people can burn off calories from overeating with cardio workouts. Thankfully, people are moving on from the way we used to think of workouts. The thinking is no longer about “cardio burns calories”; instead, the focus is on a holistic approach to health and wellness. That approach necessitates adding strength into any balanced workout.

Although strength training is more popular and widely adopted than ever, people still hold the

outdated notion that this type of exercise is exclusively for men or those who are already strong, particularly those who are young and fit. In fact, strength training is effective and beneficial for everyone, including those of all genders, ages, and physical abilities. A 2022 study led by Brigham Young University researchers showed that those who engaged in aerobic and muscle-strengthening physical activity lowered their mortality risk, even for older adults. The study’s models controlled for age, sex, race-ethnicity, income, education, marital status, survey year, smoking status, body mass index, and chronic conditions, providing a broad and inclusive sample size. The results showed that even one single hour of exercise per week could make a difference in health outcomes.

Best-selling fitness author Stephen Perrine wrote about the benefits of strength training for older adults in an article for AARP last year. He pointed out that a 2021 review of sixteen studies from around the globe found that just thirty to sixty minutes a week of muscle-strengthening, or “resistance” exercise, increased life expectancy by 10-17%. Perrine wants older adults to know that

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strength training helps maintain brain health, reduce the risk of weight gain, keep blood pressure under control, decrease the risk of heart disease, avoid diabetes, battle cancer, and improve mood and happiness.

Helping to facilitate health and fitness for all ages and abilities is a key pillar of

SportsArt's mission, and this focus is reflected in our offerings. A leader in sustainable gym equipment, we are dedicated to innovation with purpose and serving others before ourselves. We consistently create forward-thinking solutions that take into account what the fitness community wants, what they need,

and what we can offer to help them in that pursuit. Today, SportsArt offers more than eighty different models of strength equipment and nearly seventy different cardio models, and we develop rehabilitation equipment that allows differently-abled individuals to work out, as well. As trends emerge and evolve, we remain at the forefront with options that inspire performance for our customers, partners, and users.

For instance, we developed the E872 ICARE with the Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital to mimic the kinematic and electromyographic patterns of walking closer than any other product, creating a platform that can provide full-body weight support and motor guidance, along with a wheelchair ramp. We also offer treadmills with extended handrails and extra cushioning, a recumbent cycle with added flexibility for rehab variants, and an ergometer that helps seated, standing, or wheelchair users strengthen their upper bodies.

It's important to note that praising the benefits of strength training doesn't mean thinking negatively about cardio workouts. Of course those more traditional exercises are still crucial to health, and that's why SportsArt continues to make a variety of innovative cardio equipment. Right now, we're seeing fitness enthusiasts and health-minded individuals emphasize those workouts less. Continuing to offer cardio options, however, allows gym owners, recreation managers, and everyone in between to provide more options and support a more inclusive fitness environment.

As always, SportsArt doesn't just listen to what users, customers, and partners want; we lead the way to inspire performance. That's why we're working harder than ever to bring socially-responsible fitness solutions to college campuses, fitness clubs, hotel fitness centers, and everywhere in between.



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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Ruben Mejia is the executive vice president for SportsArt Americas, previously holding the title of chief technology officer. In 2000, after four years of active deployment in the military, Mejia began working in the corporate IT and telecommunication fields for the U.S. Army, launching his career and interest in the technology industry as a whole. Prior to joining SportsArt, Mejia held executive roles within the technology and ecommerce spaces.



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