



EXTENSION IMPACT

Virtual Strength Training Leads to Improved Health

Approximately two-thirds of all Wisconsin deaths are attributed to chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes. Regular physical activity reduces the risk of chronic illnesses and has additional benefits, including improvements in strength, muscle mass, bone density, and mental health. Across the United States, only 9% of adults are reaching the strength training recommendations of the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans of at least two days of strength training activities.

Existing and current research indicates that regular strength training is impactful in improving many aspects of health. Access to low cost, community-based programs for strength training is essential for increasing the number of adults engaging in exercise. Additionally, there is a gender disparity with those who have osteoporosis and osteopenia. Women start losing bone at an earlier age and at a faster rate than men. Women over 50 years of age have a four times higher rate of osteoporosis and a two times higher rate of osteopenia, and they tend to have fractures five to 10 years earlier compared with men.

Extension's StrongBodies program helps communities implement safe and effective strength training programs for midlife and older adults since 2007.

In response, Extension's StrongBodies program helps communities implement safe and effective strength training programs for midlife and older adults since 2008. The StrongBodies Program is based upon research on how strength training and proper

nutrition improves health outcomes for people of all ages. 1029 StrongBodies leaders have been trained since 2008, and over 16,000 participants have reported improved muscle strength, dynamic balance, flexibility, endurance; increases participants' knowledge of health and nutrition best practices; and increases social connection, leading to overall improved health conditions outcomes (decrease in osteoporosis, arthritis, diabetes, and depression).

2020's pandemic created a problem for older adults to both exercise and socialize in safe environments. Extension responded by adapting and offering a series of virtual strength training sessions for older adults in which they improve strength, balance, and flexibility to stay healthy and socially connected when face-to-face classes were canceled. To ensure that these participants can continue to strength-train while at home, Extension developed a virtual StrongBodies strength training program.

The online classes were viewed over 17,000 times in 2020, and Extension educators led 3,500 participants through the virtual program. In 2020, the program reached participants in 55 of Wisconsin's 72 counties. In addition, 47 new community StrongBodies leaders were trained and 45 leaders were re-trained to offer programming virtually.

Evaluations of nearly 500 StrongBodies participants indicated that 85% felt stronger due to the program, and 80% reported that their balance improved. Additionally, 78% reported that their health had improved throughout the course of the program. These improved health outcomes can reduce health care costs by helping prevent chronic health conditions and creating safe and healthy environments.



Strong Bodies is part of Extension's Health & Well-Being Institute. Learn more by visiting extension.wisc.edu/health.

in 2020



16,000+

participants reported improved muscle strength, balance & other health outcomes (since 2008)



3,500+

participants in virtual strength building classes



90+

new community-based volunteer leaders trained



Extension
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