

# HEALTHY EATING AND ACTIVE LIVING

2023 IMPACTS • UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON EXTENSION



**10,000**  
STRONGBODIES  
PARTICIPANTS

**87**  
STRONGBODIES  
LEADERS

**67**  
COUNTIES REACHED

**71**  
ADDITIONAL  
VOLUNTEERS

**482**  
IN-PERSON EVENTS

Extension's Healthy Eating Active Living and StrongBodies programs champion Wisconsin adults in discovering nearby and easily accessible programs that guide participants in the safe, effective, and progressive practice of strength training. We ensure access to valuable nutrition and health education, empowering individuals to enhance the quality of their health and lives. Together, we're building a healthier and more resilient Wisconsin where every individual has the opportunity to thrive through informed and sustainable well-being practices.

## Enhancing Health & Well-being through StrongBodies

Physical activity and movement is a cornerstone of well-being, contributing significantly to the physical, mental, and social health of communities across Wisconsin. In the face of prevalent chronic diseases and exacerbated health disparities, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive community strategy that promotes engagement in physical activity, with a specific emphasis on strength training.

Strength training not only improves muscle strength but also contributes to enhanced bone density, joint flexibility, metabolic function, and improvements in activities of daily living. Furthermore, strength training is crucial in improving bone density, reducing muscle loss, and reducing the risk of falls and fractures among older adults, promoting independence and overall quality of life.

Less than 15 percent of Americans aged 65 years and older get the recommended amounts of aerobic and muscle-strengthening physical activity outlined in the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans.



Given that Wisconsin, like many regions, has a growing aging population, prioritizing strength training becomes imperative for addressing the unique health needs of aging adults.

Extension's StrongBodies program recognizes the social health benefits of strength training in older adults. Group-based strength training sessions provide a structured and supportive environment for exercise and foster social connections and a sense of community among participants. This social aspect is particularly important for older adults who may be at risk of social isolation, as it contributes to their overall well-being and mental health.

By addressing both the physical, social, and mental dimensions of health, StrongBodies is not only targeting the immediate health concerns of older adults but also working to build a resilient and connected community. The evidence-based emphasis on strength training positions the program as a key player in promoting healthy aging and ensuring that Wisconsin communities are equipped to support the well-being of their aging residents.

## Training Leaders & Participants

Extension's Health & Well-Being Institute spearheaded a comprehensive strategy to strengthen staff and community capacities to broaden physical activity opportunities throughout the state. As the driving force behind the StrongBodies program, Extension ensures effective oversight, quality assurance, coordination, and sustainability.

The StrongBodies program is a community-based strength training program for aging adults that includes progressive resistance training, balance training, and flexibility exercises. StrongBodies programs are implemented in local communities by Extension educators, allied health professionals, aging specialists, and other community leaders.

The StrongBodies emphasis on group strength training is strategically aligned with the health needs of populations impacted by health disparities by aiming to enhance both physical and social health.

The StrongBodies comprehensive approach encompasses five key elements:

- Statewide leadership development and training of StrongBodies leaders. The Extension StrongBodies Ambassadors program has trained 1,174 community leaders since 2008. This effort also included swift adaptation to virtual training during the pandemic, ensuring continuity and social connections for older adults. In 2023, Extension trained and certified 87 new StrongBodies community leaders and educators, expanding the program's reach.
- Enhancing community and state partnerships, including collaborating with the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR), Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), hospitals, health departments, and other local organizations to provide technical assistance and strengthen partnerships.
- Strengthening the capacity for sustainability, with oversight and management of 71 StrongBodies Extension volunteers/leaders across 20 counties to ensure sustained impact.



- Utilizing online platforms for education and outreach, which featured virtual delivery of 42 StrongBodies programs across Wisconsin to expand accessibility. This effort utilized online platforms, including StrongBodies YouTube (67,922 total views) and Wisconsin Public Television tallying 17,208 engagements in 2022.
- Enhanced capacity building and outreach initiatives have been implemented to reach historically underserved audiences, including groups experiencing elevated rates of chronic health conditions such as women, rural residents, tribal members, people of minority race and ethnicity, and those with limited income. The StrongBodies leader training and pilot program was offered in Spanish and with Spanish-speaking audiences. We had collaborative efforts with Wisconsin Public Television offering recordings in English, Spanish, and Hmong/Hmoob in 2023.

Extension ambassadors, educators, community partners, and volunteers played a crucial role in establishing, expanding, and maintaining the StrongBodies program in Wisconsin. In 2023, a total of 482 in-person and 42 virtual (8-14 weeks) StrongBodies programs were provided, impacting more than 10,000 participants across 67 out of 72 Wisconsin counties and four Tribal Communities.

The program's success is further underscored by the enduring engagement of participants, ranging from those in their first year to individuals with over a decade of involvement. This sustained commitment contributes to the cumulative and profound social, mental, and physical health benefits derived from the StrongBodies Program.

## Enriching Quality of Life

Through a comprehensive approach encompassing online resources, community leader training, inclusive programming, and capacity building of volunteers, Extension in Wisconsin has significantly enhanced residents' physical, mental, and social well-being, enriching the quality of life for a diverse range of participants in the state.

The dedication to fostering equity is clearly demonstrated by a notable surge in participation from 2022 to 2023, with increases observed among various groups: women (+357 participants), residents in rural counties (+1095 participants), Tribal Nation members (+83 participants), people of color (+87 participants), Latinx participants (+87), and FoodWise participants with limited income (+52 participants).

From 2022 through 2023, the Health & Well-Being Institute's initiatives produced significant health benefits for Wisconsin's StrongBodies program participants, as evidenced by comprehensive data gathered from post-session evaluations of 3,454 participants across the state.

Notable outcomes include:

- 91% reported improvements in physical strength.
- 76% reported enhancements in mental health.
- 71% felt more socially connected.
- 88% reported improvements in overall physical health

Additional health improvements include:

- 81% reported a significant increase in physical activity.
- 91% felt physically stronger.
- 81% noted enhanced balance.
- 81% reported increased energy levels.
- 60% experienced improved sleep quality.
- 66% reported less joint pain.

This comprehensive approach – both in-person and virtually, and strengthening community capacity to offer the StrongBodies program – has not only enhanced participants' quality of life but also holds the potential to alleviate the burden on health care systems by preventing chronic health conditions. Extension's commitment to equity and well-being continues to impact the communities across all of Wisconsin positively.



**Extension**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

PROGRAM CONTACT: ANGELA FLICKINGER  
EMAIL: ANGELA.FLICKINGER@WISC.EDU

EXTENSION.WISC.EDU