

4 Ways to Fight Muscle Loss and Win

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Stay strong and preserve your independence with these simple remedies.

By K. Aleisha Fetters

Age might just be a number, but here's one that absolutely matters: 33 percent.

One out of every three adults age 60 and older suffers from severe muscle loss, according to a review paper published in *Age and Aging*. Starting at age 40, adults can lose up to 8 percent of their muscle mass per decade, with that rate accelerating up to 15 percent per decade by age 70, explains Suzette Pereira, Ph.D., a research fellow specializing in muscle health at Abbott Nutrition.

The medical term for muscle loss is sarcopenia. The condition is a driving force behind fat gain, loss of mobility and function, and even death in older adults, according to a comprehensive review published in *The Journals of Gerontology*.

"Similar to how we think about osteoporosis and protecting your bone health, we need to think the same way about muscle health," Pereira says. "The good news is science shows that with proper nutrition and exercise, maintaining your muscle can help keep you healthy, independent, and strong as you age." Here's your step-by-step guide to doing just that.

Eat (a Lot) More Protein: "Protein is a critical component in helping rebuild muscle. And while people generally know that protein is good for them, they may not know how much they actually need," Pereira says. Abbott and AARP recently surveyed adults over 50 and found that 62 percent believed that they were getting enough protein, but only 17 percent knew the amount they should consume.

How much should you aim to eat each day? More than you think. Research published in the *American Journal of Physiology – Endocrinology and Metabolism* shows that a diet with double the recommended daily allowance of protein significantly improves muscle building in adults ages 52 to 75. That works out to 1.5 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight or, for a 180-pound adult, 122.5 grams of daily protein. As you age, muscle becomes less efficient at using protein, meaning that your intake requirements increase, Pereira explains.

Combine Strength and Endurance Exercises: "Every time you lift, press, or pull a weight, you create microscopic tears in your muscles. Your body then responds with signals to repair your muscles and then some," Pereira says. Lifting weights also causes the release of key hormones that can further stimulate muscles to build mass and strength." Train with light

dumbbells and bands—like those in [SilverSneakers classes](#)—and try the weight machines at the gym.

You'll get the most out of your strength exercises when you perform them in combination with aerobic or endurance work, says Emilia Ravski, M.D., a sports medicine specialist with the Hoag Orthopedic Institute in California. Power walking, running, swimming, cycling, and cardio classes are all great options for promoting mobility and improving cardiovascular health, which in turn improves your ability to recover from each strength session.

Check Your Vitamin D Levels: “Vitamin D is well known for its role in healthy bones, but it also supports muscle health,” says Pereira, noting that as many as 42 percent of adults are deficient in vitamin D and levels tend to continue declining as we age. After all, it's likely that you spend less time out in the sun or drinking glasses of milk than you did when you were a kid.

Your doctor can perform a routine blood test to determine if your levels are too low, she says. If they are, increasing your sun exposure (still wear sunscreen) and filling up on D-rich foods like fatty fish, dairy, and eggs can help. If you're still falling short, your doctor may recommend vitamin D supplements.

Consider Taking HMB Supplements: Short for beta-hydroxy-beta-methylbutyrate, HMB is a compound that occurs naturally in the body and promotes muscle growth and faster muscle recovery following exercise. While HMB exists in very small amounts in some foods including corn, avocado, and grapefruit, supplementation can significantly improve older adults' ability to build muscle while participating in a resistance-training program, according to research published in *Experimental Gerontology*.

Before beginning any supplementation routine, talk to your doctor about the best dosage and brands for your unique needs. You can buy HMB supplements at GNC and most big-box stores. It's available in isolate or combined with such nutrients as protein or creatine.