

Find Your Inner Athlete Within Strength Training

By Samantha Durbin

Have you ever reached a physical plateau? The last time I did, I tried strength training. I remember debating it looking through the window at Circuit Works in Santa Monica. I watched about fifteen people dart around a room alternating between running on treadmills and lifting weights on various machines targeting different parts of the body. Between gasps of air, they did jumping jacks and held planks in the center of the room. I heard music pumping through the walls, and admired the mix of men and women sweating and seemingly enjoying themselves in comradeship.

After surviving my first class, I was surprised at how hard I'd pushed myself, without hurting myself, and how much fun it was. Hard fun. And when I learned that I could keep burning calories after the most challenging class I'd had in months, it clicked. I've continued with strength training classes whenever I feel the need to up my fitness ante, always leaving with the feeling I'd given both my fitness and my body a healthy strengthening jolt.

To get you pumped about strength training, the owner of Circuit Works, Raphael Verela, describes some of the fundamentals and why it's worth the sweat.

What sets strength training apart from other workouts?

"They're two types of muscle fibers in your body: fast twitch and slow twitch. Slow twitch muscle fibers are only used when doing cardio exercise. Strength training is a recruitment of the fast twitch muscle fibers, which burn more fat by utilizing more energy and continue to burn 24 hours after use.

Our class includes an interval/circuit training workout routine that rotates through a series of stations combining aerobic and weight training exercises. Our weight training incorporates machines, free weights, resistance tubing, and core strengthening exercises. The routine actually isn't much of a routine since it changes every week to prevent physical plateau and mental boredom."

You mention strength training rotates between aerobic and anaerobic exercises, and burns more calories per minute than other workouts? How does that work?

"There are two energy expenditure systems that the body uses to create fuel from stored fat for all bodily activities and movements. The Aerobic System is activated after 3-5 minutes of constant movement or activity. Running, walking, and spinning are a few examples of cardiovascular activities that use slow twitch muscle fibers.

The other energy expenditure system is the Anaerobic System, which activates immediately, but is only in use for up to three minutes of activity—it's only in use for short burst movements. Resistance activities that use fast twitch muscle fibers range from weight training to lifting something as light as a piece of paper.

Our classes switch from aerobic exercise to anaerobic exercise every 1-2 minutes, keeping the body from choosing the energy expenditure system it's going to use. This confusion forces the body to burn more calories, a process scientifically explained as the Zig Zag Theory. This activity of switching back and forth from an aerobic system to an anaerobic system is what increases the fat expenditure of the body by more than 500%. For this reason, this training burns more calories than other forms of exercise."

Do you think group personal training is as good as personal one-on-one training? What are the differences? What are the benefits of a group setting?

"Group personal training can be as good or even better than one-on-one training because of the energy from everyone in a class that motivates them even more. We have ten separate resistance stations with different exercises, and monitors on the wall showing videos of how to do the exercises. This allows our instructors the time to make the proper corrections and adjustments for every client at every station, for every rotation, just as a personal trainer would, hence the name, Group Personal Training. If you have any injuries or movement concerns, we modify for you so you don't have to worry. We guide you through the workout every step of the way."

What do you recommend as a pre and post workout snack?

"Having some protein before and after a workout increases your protein synthesis by at least 200% to 300%. Your protein synthesis is your body's ability to increase muscle and burn fat."

What's your advice for someone curious, but intimidated by strength training?

"Strength training doesn't mean you have to lift extremely heavy weight or resistance; it can just be enough resistance or weight to be able to complete a set of 12 to 15 reps comfortably. And when you're in the moment, it's not as hard as it looks."