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ADOPTING A WEIGHT TRAINING PROGRAM KEY TO ENHANCING PERFORMANCE

By Peter H. Edwards, Jr., M.D.

Weight training – also called strength or resistance training – not only can improve soccer players' strength and athletic performance, but also can prevent injury.

What is weight training?

Weight training means adding resistance to your body's natural movements to make those movements more difficult, and help muscles become stronger.

Benefits of weight training

Weight training increases fitness by:

- Increasing muscle strength and endurance
- Enhancing the cardiovascular system
- Increasing flexibility
- Maintaining the body's fat within acceptable limits.

Weight training can be an important component of a fitness program, regardless of your age or gender.

Weight training equipment

You can use free weights or weight machines. Free weights are less expensive than weight machines and are more easily adapted to smaller and larger body types. Machines are safer than most free weights because the weight is more controlled. If you use free weights, select a set of barbells or dumbbells and a weight bench for the upper extremity and barbells for the lower extremities. For all lifting, remember to use a weight belt. Some people feel weight gloves offer better grip strength; however, they are not necessary. Good athletic shoes providing firm floor traction are a must.

Starting a weight training program

First, establish goals for your program. Decide if you want to obtain good muscular tone and cardiovascular endurance, to build muscle strength in a particular muscle group to improve sports performance, or to rehabilitate an injured muscle.

To improve muscle tone and cardiovascular performance, exercises should be done at least four times a week for approximately 20 to 30 minutes a session. You can take very short rest periods (30 seconds or less) between exercises. This program generally consists of 15 to 20 repetitions of an exercise for each major muscle group.

To build strength, exercise the muscle group that you want to strengthen until fatigued. This program incorporates fewer repetitions than circuit training. For example, do three sets of repetitions, but only 8 to 10 repetitions per set, with a longer rest period of 60 to 90 seconds between each exercise. This routine may be done every other day, but not as frequently as a circuit program because the fatigued muscles need longer to recover.



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