

**BY JIM MILLER**

*Special to the Times*

A growing body of research shows that strength training exercises can have a profound impact on a person's health as they age — and you're never too old to start.

Regular strength training, done at least two nonconsecutive days a week, helps you build muscle strength, increases your bone density and improves your balance, coordination and stamina. It can also help reduce the signs and symptoms of many chronic conditions like arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, back pain, depression and obesity. And some studies even show that it helps improve cognitive function, too.

**Safety First**

For the most part, strength training exercises — especially if you start conservatively and progress slowly — are safe for most seniors, even those with serious health conditions. But, if you have health concerns or if you are currently inactive, you should talk to your doctor about what may be appropriate for you. A good self-help resource to help you find an appropriate, safe exercise program is the “Exercise and Screening for You” at [www.easyforyou.info](http://www.easyforyou.info).

### Getting Started

If you've never done strength training exercises before, you may want to work with a personal trainer for a few sessions to help you develop a safe and effective routine you can continue on your own. They cost anywhere from \$20 to \$100 per hour. To find one, ask your health care provider or contact a good health club or fitness facility in your area. You can also search for one online at reputable sites like [acefitness.org](http://acefitness.org) or [www.ideafit.com](http://www.ideafit.com).

If personal training isn't an option, there are lots of great senior strength-training videos you can purchase to guide you through a wide variety of exercises that you can do at home. Collage Video at [www.collagevideo.com](http://www.collagevideo.com), 800-819-7111, sells dozens of age- and fitness-appropriate DVDs at prices usually ranging between \$10 and \$20.

Also see [go4life.nia.nih.gov](http://go4life.nia.nih.gov), a resource created by the National Institute on Aging that offers a free exercise DVD and guide that provides illustrated examples of exercises you can do at home to strengthen your body. You can order your free copies online or by calling

800-222-2225.

## **Senior Classes**

If you don't like exercising alone or need some motivation, consider joining a gym, or call your local senior center to see if they offer any strength-training exercise classes. You should also check out SilverSneakers at [www.silversneakers.com](http://www.silversneakers.com), 888-423-4632, or [silverandfit.com](http://silverandfit.com), 877-427-4788. These are fitness programs offered in thousands of fitness centers, gyms and YMCAs throughout the U.S. that offer special classes designed for older adults. These programs are available only to seniors that have certain Medicare supplemental policies or Medicare Advantage plans.

*Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of "The Savvy Senior" book.*