

# How to Gain Strength as You Age

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# Why Strength Matters as You Age

As we get older, we naturally lose muscle mass and strength if we don't train, this is called sarcopenia. Less muscle doesn't just mean less performance; it means less resilience. It affects how easily you get off the floor, carry groceries, climb stairs, or play with your kids and grandkids. Strength is independence. Strength is confidence. And strength is one of the most trainable qualities at any age.

The goal isn't to avoid hard training. The goal is to dose it correctly so your body adapts instead of breaks down.



# The Key Principles: How Strength Is Really Built

No matter your age, the principles are the same. What changes is how precisely we apply them.

## 1. Specificity

You get strong in the movements you train. If you want stronger legs, you squat, hinge, and lunge. If you want a stronger upper body, you push, pull, and carry. As you age, “functional” matters even more—movements that transfer directly into daily life:

- Squats and sit-to-stands → getting off the couch or the floor
- Deadlifts and hinges → picking things up safely
- Presses and carries → putting things overhead, carrying bags, holding a child

At CFM, we anchor your training around these fundamental patterns so the strength you gain shows up in the real world.

## 2. Progressive overload

Your body adapts to the stress you place on it. To keep getting stronger, you need to gradually increase the challenge over time:

- A bit more weight
- A few more reps
- An extra set
- Slightly higher tempo or more demanding variation

For aging athletes, progressive overload is *non-negotiable*—but it has to be controlled. You don't jump from a 20-pound kettlebell to a 70-pound barbell overnight. You build. Week by week, block by block. Done right, your joints feel *better*, not worse, because the muscles around them are actually supporting you.

## 3. Individual differences

Two 55-year-olds are not the same. Training history, injuries, lifestyle, stress, sleep, and nutrition all affect how you respond to training. That's why cookie-cutter "over-40" programs fail a lot of people.

At CrossFit Milford, we individualize *inside* the group:

- Scaling options that respect your joints and abilities
- Load and rep adjustments that match your current capacity
- Coaching that helps you move well first, then add intensity second

The principle is simple: the right dose for *you* is what makes you stronger, not the prescription written on the whiteboard.

#### 4. Fatigue management

As you age, you can absolutely handle intensity –but you may not recover from *reckless* intensity. Strength gains don't happen in the workout; they happen in the recovery from the workout.



That means:

- Smart weekly structure (not maxing out every day)
- Rest days that are truly restorative
- Sleep and nutrition treated as part of your training plan, not an afterthought

We want you leaving most sessions feeling “challenged but capable,” not wrecked and limping for three days.

## **How to Build and Maintain Strength as You Age**

So what does this look like in practice?

### **1. Lift 2-4 days per week**

You don't need to live in the gym, but you do need consistency. Two very focused strength sessions per week can make a big difference. Three to four sessions per week will move the needle even more if your schedule and recovery allow it.

Each week should include:

- **Lower body strength:** squats, deadlifts/hinges, step-ups, lunges
- **Upper body pushing:** presses, push-ups, dumbbell or barbell work
- **Upper body pulling:** rows, pull-ups (or progressions), band work
- **Core and trunk work:** carries, planks, anti-rotation exercises

## 2. Train strength across rep ranges

As you age, you benefit from a mix of heavier work and moderate rep work:

- Lower reps (3-6) with controlled, heavier loads to build maximal strength
- Moderate reps (6-10) for muscle mass, joint health, and control
- Occasionally higher reps (10-15) on accessories for local endurance and tissue resilience

We're not maxing out all the time. We're building layers: strength, muscle, control, and confidence.

### **3. Prioritize technique and control**

Good movement is your long-term insurance policy.

We slow you down to speed you up:

- Full range of motion where appropriate
- Stable joints (knees tracking well, spine braced, shoulders set)
- Eccentric control—owning the lowering phase, not just the lift

This not only keeps you safer; it actually creates a better strength stimulus.

### **4. Use strength to support your conditioning—not the other way around**

Cardio is important, but if all you do is long, easy cardio and light circuits, you'll eventually trade muscle for "fitness." For aging athletes, that's the opposite of what you want.

The approach we use:

- Maintain and build strength with focused lifting
- Layer in conditioning that supports, not steals from, your strength—intervals, mixed-modal work, and aerobic sessions that respect recovery

Adjust volume so your joints feel better *because* you're stronger, not beat up from endless repetitive work

# The Long Game: Strength as a Lifestyle

Maintaining strength as you age isn't about recreating your 25-year-old self. It's about building the strongest, most capable version of who you are *now*, and who you want to be in 10, 20, 30 years.

When you understand the principles—specificity, progressive overload, individualization, and fatigue management—and you apply them consistently, your training stops being random “workouts” and becomes a long-term plan for independence, vitality, and performance.

At CrossFit Milford, that's what we do every day: we help you train in a way your future self will thank you for.