

BATTLING SARCOPENIA

You Can Turn Back the Clock

by Carol Ann Weber



Ah, aging. Grocery bags feel heavier, jars are harder to open, and your legs don't carry you up the stairs as easily. While you may consider these to be normal signs of aging, a decline in functional fitness is actually due to a condition known as sarcopenia.

WHAT IS SARCOPENIA?

From birth to around age 30, your muscles are programmed to grow stronger and larger. But in your 30s, muscle mass and function begin to decline at a rate of three to five percent per decade. Welcome to age-related muscle loss, or sarcopenia. However, the latest research challenges the assumption that sarcopenia is inevitable, as the causes are often more lifestyle related instead of a result of normal aging.

That's not to say that aging doesn't play its part. As you grow older, you experience a reduction in nerve cells that send signals from your brain to your muscles, and a decline in the body's ability to convert protein to energy. But many accelerate this muscle loss by becoming less active and by not consuming adequate amounts of protein.

RESISTANCE TRAINING

Whether you use your own body weight or the equipment at the gym, resistance training is the most effective way to win the battle with sarcopenia. It positively

stimulates the neuromuscular system, as well as muscle growth, protein synthesis, and hormonal activity. When these key functions decline, sarcopenia develops.

Strive to work your muscles at least three times per week. Here are some effective moves to get you started:

Air Squats

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointed slightly outward. Engage your abdominal muscles and pull your shoulder blades together slightly to push out your chest. Squat back as if you were about to sit in a chair. Keep your weight over your heels so you don't lean forward. Your hips should move down and back. Hold for a few seconds, then rise up by pushing through your heels and using your glutes to return to a standing position. Complete 3 sets of 10 repetitions.

Plank Push-Up

Start in a high plank position with your body in a straight line from your head to your toes and your hands directly under your shoulders. In a slow, controlled motion, lower yourself onto your right forearm, then onto your left forearm. From this position, place your right hand on the ground. Engage your core and push your body back up into a high plank. Immediately repeat with your left hand. Pause, then repeat. Complete 3 sets of 10 repetitions.

Tricep Dip

Sit on a chair or bench and grip the front edges with your hands. Hover your derriere just in front of the seat with your feet flat on the floor and your legs bent so your thighs are parallel to the floor. Straighten your arms. Slowly lower your body toward the floor until your arms form 90-degree angles. Engage your triceps to press back up to the starting position. Repeat 10 times, completing 3 sets.

Dumbbell Chest Press

Lying on the floor or on a flat bench, grab a pair of dumbbells (start light and work your way up to heavier dumbbells). Engage your abdominal muscles and press the dumbbells toward the ceiling. Slowly lower the dumbbells until your upper arms are level with your back. Your elbows should be 45 degrees away from your body. Pause at the bottom of the movement. Complete 3 sets of 10 repetitions. ■



Carol Ann Weber's 500+ articles have been published in magazines such as *Fitness Rx*, *Muscle & Fitness*, *Oxygen*, and *Men's Fitness*. She has also been named the Academy of Bodybuilding and Fitness "Best Columnist of the Year." Along with weight training, she enjoys yoga and a brisk walk anywhere outdoors.