

# **Episode 35 – Who Needs Weights? Using Bodyweight Training for Better Fitness**

This is the TD Fitness podcast with coach T, episode number 35.

Welcome to the TD Fitness podcast, giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. And now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

What's up, guys. I'm Coach T. This is episode number 35, who needs weights? In this episode we are using bodyweight training for better fitness. So I'm going to talk about how and why bodyweight training is probably the most appropriate way to incorporate resistance training into your routine for most of the people that are listening to this podcast.

Now, there is a freebie associated with this podcast. I'll talk a little bit about that later in the episode. But I want to start with something you may not know, and that is this fact, the fact that adults lose approximately three pounds of muscle every six years, and it's primarily due to a lack of exercise that just happens as we age. Now, why is this important? Well, for one, muscle is more metabolically active than the other components of our body, so more metabolically active for example, than fat mass, or the fatty mass that we carry.

Muscles help us move. They help us lift, push, pull. You know all of this. So, muscles are important, and it's important to retain or maintain a certain amount of muscle mass. So how do you avoid muscle loss over time? Well, the key is a little bit of nutrition, yes, but also resistance training, also known as weight lifting. But resistance training and weightlifting are not one and the same as you might think. So the difference between weight lifting and resistance training. Weightlifting involves extra or excess weight that you're trying to move. Resistance training is anything that provides resistance to your movement. It doesn't have to be with weights and I'll explain that throughout this episode.

Now remember, I tend to talk about general health. The types of people that I kinda cater to with my personal training and health coaching are those that are typically starting or getting back into health and fitness routines or trying to make their routines habitual, a regular part of their lives.

So I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time talking about weight training, although that is important. Weight training can be used to maintain muscle. It can be used to build muscle, obviously to build a lot of muscle, thinking about bodybuilders here. It can be used in the rehabilitation setting. There are many different applications for weight training. It's good for a lot of things. But the point I want to make here is that bodyweight training is also a good alternative, particularly for everyday maintenance. And if you're looking to reduce the chance of injury and when you have minimal or no equipment, sometimes bodyweight training is just more convenient.

So again, resistance training is any type of exercise whose primary purpose is to provide resistance to the movement that you're trying to perform. Weight training and lifting weights is a form of resistance training, probably the most popular form, but other alternatives include things like using

tubes or bands bodyweight training, again, like we're going to talk about here. And I apologize for my voice. I'm just getting over something, so hopefully you'll bear with me. It doesn't sound too bad. I have my water here, so I'll try to stay hydrated and keep my throat wet.

So let's back up just a little bit and talk a little bit about the benefits of resistance training. Now, probably the most popular benefit is resistance training gives you strength, so your muscle, it's important that you maintain some amount of strength and build strength and your capacity to get stronger. So resistance training is absolutely the best thing for that. It's also good for muscular endurance. So when I say endurance, I'm talking about those longer term, longer lasting events. Things like races, like triathlon races, marathons, things like that. Even the shorter races though. It doesn't have to necessarily be a marathon, but endurance is essentially the repetitive movements that you do over, and over, and over again that in singleton, in each individual movement isn't that taxing, but you're able to put them all together over a longer period of time. You're able to put those maybe somewhat easy steps or easy spurts of jogs together for a longer run, a longer distance. So that's what I mean when we're talking about endurance training.

Resistance training is also good to increase muscular mass, or the size of muscles, or the amount of muscle you have, I should say. I go back to what I said in the beginning, muscle is more metabolically active. So the more muscle mass you have in relation to fat mass, the more calories you burn as part of your basal metabolic rate or your resting metabolic rate, what we typically think of as your metabolism. Resistance training is also good for improving your appearance and your body composition. It's something that many people think about, how can I look better in my swimsuit? Well, one of the keys is to increase your muscular mass and reduce your fat mass. So body composition and appearance are very important to a lot of people, and resistance training is one of the things that can help you get there.

Now, it's important to understand too, that as we age, we lose some of the things that I just mentioned. In fact, all of them tend to deteriorate, so resistance training is going to be even that much more important. We lose strength as we get older. We just get weaker, we're aging. We lose muscular endurance if we don't continue to exercise. We lose muscle mass and gain fat mass. I mentioned in the very beginning of the episode, adults lose approximately three pounds of muscle every six years. So it's just a natural occurrence that the body tends to lose muscle mass as we tend to age. But also, our bones get weaker, particularly as we start reaching the more senior ages. They get weaker, they get more brittle. And resistance training helps to improve not only muscular strength, but it improves bone strength by loading those bones and loading the joints, making them stronger and better able to withstand weightbearing and falls. So resistance training actually helps reduce the risk of injury and that is why it's important, for all of those reasons, that's why it's important to maintain some resistance training in your routine as we age.

Now, our fitness needs change as we age. So I'll tell you my quick story. In high school, I really didn't lift weights at all. I can count on one hand, literally, the number of times that I lifted weights when I was in high school. Now, that's not to say that I didn't exercise because I was involved in a lot of sports, but at our high school, when I was growing up, if you did not play football then you just didn't really have a need to lift weights. I played basketball primarily and baseball primarily, so those were my sports. I only played football one year, so I didn't get in the weight room a lot. It wasn't until I got to college that I started to really lift to improve my physique and to improve my sport performance, playing basketball at the college level. So I got smarter about things and continued to lift weights really well into my 30s.

But that's when things started to break down a little bit. I noticed that I started to have more injuries. If you think back to the last episode where I talked about the shoulder pain and how to protect your shoulders. I had shoulder injuries, I've had knee injuries, I've had ankle injuries. So I started to see that I was doing the same types of exercises well into my 30s, but my injuries were increasing and not only that, but it was taking me longer to recover, so I had to scale back. And it was also around that time that I started to really get smart about what it meant to exercise and how I should be exercising as I went about learning and studying for my professional certification in the health and fitness field.

Now, this point in my life, I'm 43 years old and my main fitness goal, my main physical goal, aside from just normal good health is to complete one long distance triathlon every year. So that's my main fitness goal. So in that, I do almost all bodyweight training for my strength workouts during the training season, which is about half of the year, about six months out of a year. So for me, it's been all about the time and convenience and the purpose, thinking about why I want to be strong and be fit and how I want to incorporate that into my routine, so that it ultimately feeds my goal, in this case, of being the best triathlete that I can. So you have to think about what it is you want to achieve. For me, it's to maintain strength, it's to look fit and to be flexible. So what can I do to achieve that given the time constraints and lack of access to equipment many times that I have? And that is in line with my approach towards bodyweight training.

Now, I don't want you to just take my word for it. So you may have heard of an individual by the name of Herschel Walker. He was a very popular NFL football player, and he writes in a book that he coauthored called Basic Training. He describes essentially his routine, which consisted almost entirely of bodyweight exercises. So if you're familiar with this at all, you've probably heard that Hershel Walker used to do thousands of pushups and sit ups every day. Well, that's, as he writes, it's actually true. And he had a lot of variety in his routine as well. So he would do literally thousands of pushups, sit ups, pull ups, dips, squats, lunges every single day. He would incorporate running, he would incorporate water works, so swimming and things like that, multiple sports, he played tennis. All of these types of things, these variety of exercises and events, he tried to incorporate into his routine. And if you've ever seen Herschel Walker, he is a very fit individual.

So that's typically the example used by a lot of people. That's the testament to what bodyweight training can give you. He was also very consistent though. Like I said, he did that every single day. But he essentially gave us the example that showed us that bodyweight training can absolutely be used as a replacement in some sorts for traditional lifting, lifting weights. You can actually use bodyweight training and accomplish some of the same things. Now, I will say, I'm going to caveat, that that is not always the case. He obviously had some very good genetics on his side, but the point is still valid. For everyday exercisers and those like you and me who are just looking to become more fit, then bodyweight training is absolutely appropriate.

So bodyweight training is a staple in the fitness routines of many fitness or professional athletes, I should say. It's a staple in the health and fitness routines of folks just like you and I. And the reasons why? Well, primarily because it's practical. So remember, we're talking general health and fitness here, not Mr. and Mrs. Olympia competitions, not the bodybuilding competitions. I'm talking about regular folks just like you and I. Bodyweight training is quicker and convenient. It's just a fact. Our schedules are so super busy today, whether you're a working professional, whether you're a stay at home parent, whether you have kids or not, you're probably involved in a lot of different things, and time becomes more and more of the essence and it's the thing that we tend to lose a little bit more and more of each and every day.

So our schedules are so busy and we hardly have room for exercise, but bodyweight training takes so much less time than going to the gym and trying to lift a lot of weight. Your rest periods tend to be shorter between your sets. I went to the gym just this morning and I knocked out a bodyweight session in about just under 20 minutes. Went to the gym, came back home, I was gone for just over 30 minutes total. So it leaves time in our schedule too for other important fitness components like cardiovascular activity, which is going to be good for the heart, but also it leaves time in our schedule for other things in life that are important. And you can do bodyweight training at home. You can do it while you're traveling. You can do it just about anywhere.

What I really like about it is that it's good for beginners, and it's good for those who are just getting back into exercise because you can scale it. You can change the angle at which you perform certain movements. An example here is a pushup, for example, is more difficult than a push off of a wall because the angle and the effects of gravity work differently in those different scenarios. So both work the chest muscles, but the wall pushes are a lot easier. And if you're just getting into bodyweight training and you're not able to do a pushup, you can absolutely start with wall pushes and then moved down to a point where your torso is inclined or elevated above your feet, maybe a chair or a couch or something like that, use that to push off, and then work your way down to the floor to do a pushup. So that's what I mean by changing the angles of your body.

You can also abbreviate or truncate the movement, or just not go all the way through the range of motion. So if you can't go all the way down on a pushup, just go halfway down and back up, halfway down and back up. All of this is bodyweight training, all of this is resistance training, and it all serves to make you better, stronger than you were before.

One of the basic tenants tenets that we learn as fitness professionals, as personal trainers is that there are essentially three components to resistance training. The three components are specificity, overload, and progression, SOP. Specificity means that you have to train the right muscles in the way that you want them to perform, and I'll give you an example here in a second. Overload means that you build strength or size by placing a greater demand on the muscle than it can handle. You have to push it in order for it to grow, and that's true with so many things in life, right? You have to go outside of your comfort zone in order to move forward. And progression, you have to overload smartly in a manner that isn't too much, too fast, yet it's still enough to make progress. So specificity, overload, and progression.

What I'm arguing is that you can get all of these through bodyweight training, specificity, overload and progression, with just a little bit of out of the box thinking. So if you want to jump higher, for example, if you want to be able to lift more, then you have to train the legs, and the core, and other parts of your body too, yes, but the legs are your jumpers and they're your lifters from the ground, right? That specificity. It seems obvious, but you're not going to perform bicep curls in order to make yourself jump higher. That just doesn't make sense. So that's what we mean when we talk about specificity.

So how do you provide overload? Well, the thing to understand here is that it's all about your total load and volume, so how much your muscles are resisted over the course of that workout. So volume is really a function of three things. It's the amount of weight that you lift or what is resisting you, it's the number of repetitions you do with that weight or resistance, and it's the number of sets or groups of repetitions that you do. So for example, if I go to the gym and lift 100 pounds, it doesn't matter what kind of lifted is, I'm just using 100 pounds as an example to make the math easy. So I lift

100 pounds and I do five sets of five reps each, so that's 25 total reps times 100 pounds for each one. That's 2500 pounds I've lifted during that workout.

Now, if I go and do 10 sets of 10 reps at 25 pounds each, that's also a total of 2500 pounds lifted over the course of a workout. But in the second example, I only lifted 25 pounds, in the first example, I lifted 100 pounds for each rep, yet my total volume was still 2500 pounds. So essentially you can perform the same amount of work with more repetitions using a lighter weight, and that's basically what bodyweight training does for you. You can provide intensity or overload through repetition versus weight. It's all about the volume. The load and the volume equals the sets, times the reps, times the weight. That's overload.

What are some other ways that you can provide overload? You can wear a weighted vest, although that's not necessarily bodyweight training, but in some cases it is because you're not actually putting or holding extra weight, you have it attached to your body. You can use different angles, as I mentioned before, factors that we can vary. Think about the frequency of your repetitions, the intensity, the type of exercises you can do, the speed with which you do those exercises. So when you move through slower and more methodically, you're not able to do as many pushups as when you just sit down and try to crank a bunch of pushups out. So the speed and the form of the lift also play a major factor.

So the third point here is progression. So the progressive repetition approach works well, I'll say until your set exceeds about 100 seconds. So after about a minute and 40 seconds, that's where the strength building stimulus starts to diminish. So you can start to progress, you can continue to progress, I should say, with your bodyweight training, but once you're doing a set that lasts longer than, or upwards of two minutes, then you're really getting into the endurance range, which is fine if that's what you're training for. But when it comes to progression, you can continue to add more and more repetitions, and that is one way to approach or provide progression in your workout.

Now, a huge benefit of bodyweight training is that many bodyweight exercises are our core exercises as well. And I don't want to confuse you here. I don't mean core in the sense of the muscles in your abdomen, lower back and midsection, that is one type of core, but I'm talking core exercises in a different sense. And by definition, an exercise that is a core exercise is one that involves movement at two or more primary joint, so it's a multi-joint exercise, and the exercises uses, or the exercise uses one or more large muscle groups or areas of muscle, like your chest, your upper back, your hips or thighs with the help of at least a smaller muscle group like your biceps or triceps.

So for example, the bench press is a core exercise because it involves movement principally at the shoulder and the elbow joints, so multi-joint, and it uses the large chest muscles with the help of the shoulder muscles and the triceps. Other examples are the SWAT or the lunge. They involve movement at the hips and the knees, so multi-joint, and the ankles, I should say, and they recruit the glutes and the quadriceps as the primary muscle movers. So core exercises are the most beneficial type of resistance exercise because they target muscle groups that take several assistant exercises to work the same type of thing. So what I mean by that is you can do bicep curls or tricep extensions all day, but you can get a better benefit from something like a bench press or a row exercise because you're also working your biceps or triceps in those instances as well, as well as your major muscle groups as well.

So as personal trainers, what we try to do is choose core exercises primarily for programming because they are typically more effective at helping clients reach their goals. So again, a huge benefit of

bodyweight training is that almost all of the body weight exercises are core exercises. They're core in the sense that they work multiple joints and major muscle groups, but they also require you to keep your actual core muscles, those in your midsection, engaged. If you doubt this, then I want you to get down and try doing a pushup, or a lunge, or a squat, or a pull up with a saggy midsection and see how that works out for you. Try doing it without engaging the core. It's almost impossible.

Now, I don't think I can make much of a better argument than that when it comes to bodyweight training, but I want you to remember that most of what I do is to try to show utility in things that maybe you thought weren't as effective as they actually are. So exercise only works for you if you do it. So if you're struggling to get some exercise into your day, are you more likely and better equipped and postured to go to a gym and lift weights? Or are you more likely to do a 15 to 20 minute body weight routine at home or at work? Again, I go back to my exercise routine this morning. It took me a little less than 30 minutes to complete that exercise routine. It was completely bodyweight training. That would have taken me 45 minutes to an hour if I had to move, and switch weights, and move to different machines, and so forth. So again, exercise only works if you do it. So if bodyweight training makes things more convenient for you, then I highly encourage you to try it and to incorporate that into your routine.

Now, before I sign off, I want to quickly describe that there are five primary movements associated with any kind of any kind of resistance regimen. They're the bend and lift movements, typically known as a squat, squatting movement. There's the single leg movement, the most common variant there is the lunge. Then you have pushing movements, you have pulling movements and rotational movement. So five primary movements, five primary categories. So what I've done is developed a freebie for you. It's 18 bodyweight exercises that you can do anywhere, and I've included for squat variance, for a lunge variance, for pulls, for pushing exercises, and two examples of rotational exercises. So you can grab that freebie at [tdfitness.net/035download](http://tdfitness.net/035download). And I want you to combine or very a few of these each week, and I promise you, you'll be well on your way to adding and keeping muscle.

And don't worry, you're not going to look like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Herschel Walker for that matter. Although, again, Herschel Walker is a great example of what you can do with bodyweight training. As I mentioned, there were definitely genetics involved there too, I'm sure. So go ahead and grab that freebie, 18 bodyweight exercises that you can do anywhere. When you download that pdf, the video demos were included in the pdf, so you can just click on the picture of the exercise for the demo.

Now, before I sign off, it's important to remember that mobility must precede stability. What do I mean by that? So resistance training, bodyweight training provides stability for your muscles and your joints in the movement patterns that you take part in. In order to be truly stable, the muscles have to be able to move through the required ranges of motion. Otherwise, the body's just going to compensate and you're asking for injury. If it doesn't hit you immediately, it will over time, I promise you. So an adequate range of motion allows you to build strength and muscle with a reduced risk of injury, and a more balanced result. So range of motion is achieved by regular mobility, flexibility and stretching exercises. Refer back to episode number seven. I'll provide a link to that here in the show notes. That was the single most important movement concept, a simple fix to rid yourself of common joint pain. And I talk all about the importance of stretching and exercise and mobility.

So finally, show notes can be found for this episode at [tdfitness.net/035](http://tdfitness.net/035). You can grab the freebie there and the show notes as well. As always, I want to thank you guys so much for tuning in. You have a blessed one. Coach T, out.

