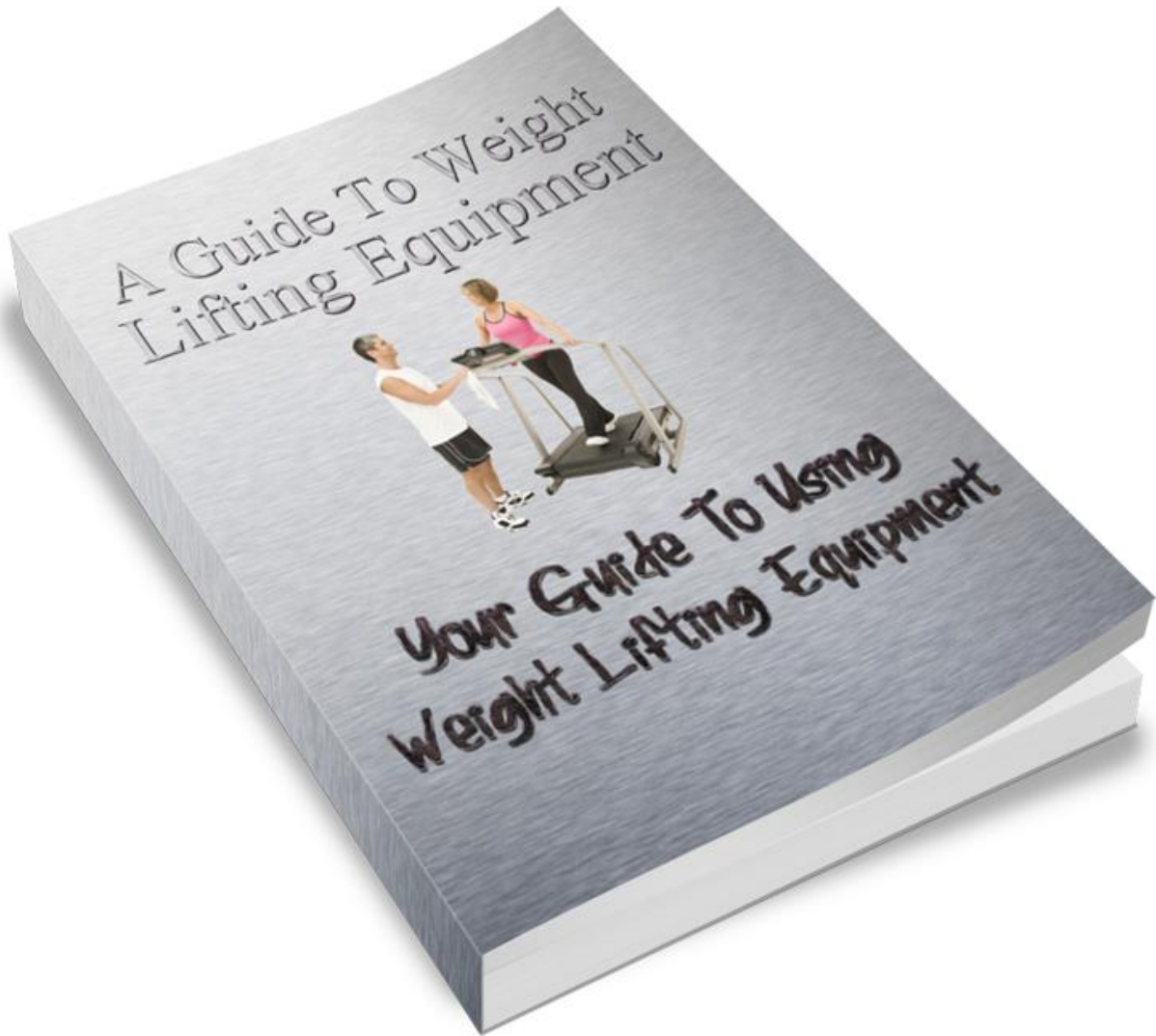


A Guide To Weight Lifting Equipment



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Advantages of Free Weights Over Exercise Machines

If you are considering starting a new strength-training program, or if you are interested in creating a home gym in your home, you may have been struggling with the debate of whether to go with free weights or an exercise machine. Overall, free weights seem to have the advantage of being better for your workout. Here are some reasons why.

Current research suggests that you will get stronger using mainly free weights. This may be because you use different muscles when working with free weights than with the assistance of a machine. Free weights are also closer to movements that you make during every day life.

Exercises that require more than one muscle group, such as squats and bench presses, are more complicated with free weights. This is because you have to stabilize yourself more than you would if you were using a machine. The machine stabilizes you by only allowing you make the movement along the track. This can lead to greater strength and improved balance.

Free weights allow for a variety of different workouts. With a machine you are limited to the movements that the machine can perform. Free weights are also more portable, meaning that you can perform your exercises in a variety of locations if desired. Try caring your home gym with you next time you want to go on vacation or workout outside!

If your budget is tight or you are not sure how long you are going to stick with your routine, free weights are a cheaper investment than an exercise machine. Since they come in a variety of sizes, you can also purchase free weights in the exact sizes to fit your workout routine best.

Some find the simplicity of using an exercise machine to be boring and unchallenging. This may cause you to drop your workout routine sooner and hinder you from reaching your goals. Or you may be tempted to overdo it to challenge yourself more and cause an injury.

Exercise machines require more maintenance to upkeep than free weights. There are moving parts to maintain in good working order. Replacement parts can become expensive. You will need to know where replacement parts can be bought, as well as who will install them for you.

If you have a small space, free weights take up a lot less room to use than an exercise machine. They can also be stored with more flexibility if needed. They are easy to push out of the way if you want to use your gym area for something else when you are not working out.

This is not to say that free weights are the perfect solution to everything. There are a few things that you may want to consider.

Free weights can be harder for a new trainer to master. Exercise machines have a set movement path, making the motions easier to master. Since the movement is not set, free weights may carry an increased risk of injury if you do not know how to use them properly.

Exercise machines can be faster to use. This is because they do not require moving plates or tracking down larger weights to upgrade your workout, instead it is a simple matter of moving a pin or a hook.

Exercise machines offer a consistent amount of resistance, regardless of what part of the motion you are performing. For free weights, the resistance can vary depending on what position you are in and how much gravity is helping you. Generally the top of the movement has more resistance than the bottom of the movement. This may mean that you need to vary your exercises more to work all muscle groups equally.

Machines can also make it easier to do circuit training, such as transferring quickly from arm curls to lateral pulls to bench pressing. Often this can be performed by just moving a pulley or a pin. In free weights you do have to set up equipment in between exercises.

Despite this, many people still feel that free weights provide a more complete workout. Before making your final decision, you may find it helpful to try out both styles and see what fits your routine the best.

Before starting any type of workout, always make sure to check with your doctor.

Get Smart About Training with Dumbbells

Dumbbells have been a staple in the workout routines of many bodybuilders and fitness enthusiasts for a long time now. Considered a free weight, these small devices are designed to be held easily with one hand. If you are ready to purchase your very own set, you will want to pay attention to the two varieties that are on the market:

First and foremost are the adjustable dumbbells which essentially are nothing more than a short steel bar which is set up to receive weighted disks that are placed on either end. Resembling a small barbell, these devices offer great flexibility with respect to the kinds of workouts you can do.

Secondly are the fixed-weight dumbbells, which are nothing more than specified weights in the shape of the traditional dumbbell.

Once you have chosen the kind of dumbbell that best suits your needs, you will want to consider what else you may need. In order to be smart about using this exercise equipment, you want to ensure that you get the maximum value out of your investment, as well as a large variety of workout options, so that you will not get bored and your dumbbells soon are nothing more than a dust gathering devices at the back of your closet. To this end, you may also wish to purchase the following:

An exercise bench that is adjustable to different angles. This will permit you to further vary the exercises you do with your new set of dumbbells and will not only add some interesting new workout options, but will also challenge you more if you begin to get comfortable with one particular workout.

If you are exercising on anything other than a carpeted surface, you may also wish to invest in a heavy rubber mat to absorb the shock of falling dumbbells. Without it, your nice new kitchen floor or bathroom tile will soon have unsightly grooves or nicks.

Set up some workout time with a professional trainer. Yes, you may have thought that you could stay away from the expensive gym altogether and just do your workout at home and you still can. But an hour of a trainer's time will help you to understand how to do a variety of exercises, which muscle groups they target, how to avoid getting injured, and how to best transition between exercise routines.

If you are absolutely set against setting even one foot inside a gym, consider purchasing a workout tape that is dedicated to the use of dumbbells to learn how to get all the benefits of your new exercise equipment without getting all the headaches, muscle aches, and joint pains.

Last but not least, be smart about how you work out.

Think of real life applications that your exercises will have and keep practicing them. Not only will this help you in your everyday life with chores and activities you do now, but it will permit you to see a reason for your exercises, and to have a goal to work toward.

For example, if your goal is to climb two flights of stairs with two sacks of groceries without getting winded instead of always relying on the slow elevator to get you and your groceries to your apartment, you will be able to use your dumbbells as part of that stair climbing exercise. You can use them while working out on a stair climbing machine, or simply by climbing the two flights of stairs in your apartment complex until you find that you are getting further and further without getting winded.

Be smart about your exercise regimen! Just as you wouldn't expect to drop down and do 100 push-ups if you have never even made it through five, you shouldn't expect to do a bunch of shoulder presses and lateral rises without some warm up first.

As a matter of fact, some light aerobic workout before any kind of exercise is a great way of loosening up the muscles and getting your body ready for some intense work. Failure to warm up properly will almost certainly result in painfully pulled muscles, bruised shoulders, or worse!

So go ahead and exercise with those dumbbells -- the smart way!

The Most Important Exercise Equipment for Your Strength Training Needs

Strength training is becoming one of the more popular exercise styles. Not only can you burn calories and lose weight, you can sculpt those bags and sags into a lean machine. You probably have seen several different high-priced work out machines on the television or online. But you can get a great starting workout in your own home with some basic equipment.

In order to make the most of your strength-training workout, you constantly need to be able to increase the weights that you are working with. It is also helpful to be able to do many different exercises to work different muscle groups. To do this, it is helpful to have a variety of equipment in different weights at home. That way, you can exercise at a time that is convenient for you, but still get the same great workout you would if you were going to the local gym.

The first thing to look for is a good dumbbell set. You don't need a lot of them to begin with, just in enough sizes for you to get a good workout. They come in a variety of sizes – anywhere from one pound up to 100 pounds. You will need two in each size – one for each arm. These come in a variety of styles from plain metal to brightly colored rubber so you can find the perfect look for you.

Start with a lighter one that offers only minimal resistance – for most people a five-pound weight is a perfect beginning weight. Also get the next couple of sizes up so as your strength improves you can also increase the weight. If you are on a tight budget, wait to buy the really heavy ones until you are actually close to needing them. A second option is to get a barbell-style dumbbell that allows you to add and subtract disc-style weights to meet your needs.

The second thing to look for is a barbell set. This will give you some variety in your workout by allowing you to perform different exercises, as well as allow you to lift heavier weights. You will need a bar and a variety of the disc-shaped weights, as well as clips to help hold weights in place.

The weights vary in size from just over a pound to over 50 pounds, and again you could purchase the sizes that best fit your workout. It may be helpful to purchase a stand for it as well, especially if you plan on using heavier weights for bench pressing or squats. That way you have a place to set it if you get tired mid-workout, and it also works well for storage.

A third item to consider is a weight bench. They come in a variety of styles from ones to lay flat only to those that adjust. One that is adjustable will be able to fill more needs though will be somewhat more expensive. Another option for the budget-minded is to get a large step that includes risers to adjust the height.

In doing so you can place more risers on one end or the other to make an incline or decline bench as needed. It can also double as a step-aerobic tool if you pair your strength training with cardiovascular exercise.

To protect your hands, a fourth item to consider is weight-lifting gloves. You can find them in different finger lengths to fit you comfortably. Gloves will help keep weights from slipping, as

well as protect your hands from getting calluses. Look for gloves that are made of breathable fabric that allows your hands to breathe. Gloves can be found at any sporting goods store.

If you travel or just do not have a lot of space at home, resistance bands might be another ideal purchase for you. Small enough to store at home or in your suitcase, they can be used for a variety of workouts. They also offer a different resistance than your standard free weights, which can give you some variety on your off days or when you feel you are hitting a plateau in your workout.

With a small variety of equipment, you will be ready to start your strength-training workout from the comfort of your own home in no time.

The Must-Haves in Toning Equipment for Women

Women often have different workout goals than men. Where men want to bulk up and build muscle, women usually want to slim down and tone. This can cause a problem if you are using the wrong equipment.

First thing to remember in trying to tone is that you are going for the number of repetitions, not a higher weight. Always choose lighter weights that you do more repetitions with. If you already have free weights or an exercise machine at home, you can use these items. Try to use the lighter weights or the lowest setting and perform more repetitions.

One of the more popular pieces of toning equipment for women is a medicine ball. Smaller than exercise balls, they range from 2 to twelve pounds and help promote muscle strength and endurance. They can be used for a variety of exercises that simulate everyday movements. With a variety of catching, throwing, and reaching movements you can work out both your upper and lower body, improving coordination and endurance during aerobic or strength training workouts.

Toning bands are a great way to add some shape to your body as well, without the hassle of dumbbells. Easy to store or take with you, they are also easy to use for a variety of exercises for both upper and lower body benefits. For the upper body, they can be used to tone abdominals, arms, shoulders, chest and back.

For lower body they work great on legs, thigh, and butt. Since bands use a slightly different muscle group than free weights, they can also be used in addition to free weights to add some variety to your workout. Some sets offer over the door hanging equipment that can add even more options when using the bands.

Exercise or stability balls can be a fun addition to your exercise routine. Just balancing on the ball requires the use of your core muscles helping to slim your mid-section. Joining a class or getting a video can give you good ideas for different exercises that you can do with the ball so that you do not get bored. If you are new to using an exercise ball, some companies offer a stabilizer ring to keep the ball from rolling around while you learn to balance on it.

Adding a little weight to your cardio exercises can help with the toning that you need. Any easy way to this is to get wrist and ankle weights. Lightweight (usually under 10 pounds for ankles and five pounds for wrists) they Velcro on and can be used in many cardio activities.

Wristbands are perfect for activities such as jogging, walking, or aerobics. Ankle bands should not be used for walking, but make a good addition to floor routines. If you do a lot of workouts in the pool you can even get waterproof weights for pool use.

Yoga is a very popular toning exercise. Some beginners find the poses or deep stretches difficult to do at first. If this is the case with you, consider getting a yoga block or yoga bands. A block is usually made of high-density foam and can be placed under your body for support during certain poses. Yoga bands are held with an end in each hand and the middle hooked around your feet to assist with deeper stretches.

It is also very helpful to have a mat underneath you while you are exercising. Mats can act as a cushion for movements that require you to be on the floor as well as absorb impact of cardio exercises. They range in size from portable yoga mats, to floor mats that fold for easy storage, to floor mats that are permanently installed. You can choose the style that works best for your needs.

Whatever equipment you decide to go with, you should always make sure that it is safe and in good repair. Know how to use equipment properly and get instructions if it is new to you. Always consult with your doctor before starting a new exercise routine as he or she may have some advice on exercises that you can do or that should be avoided. Keep your routine varied and fun for the best results.

Achieve your Fitness Goals With a Kettlebell Workout

Weight lifting has long since been a staple of many a workout routine. Yet while many an avid weight lifter is well familiar with the traditional barbell, the kettlebell is only recently coming back into the good graces of exercise aficionados everywhere. Its country of origin is Russia, where it began as a simple cannonball to which a handle was attached.

For those who do not wish to invest in yet another piece of exercise equipment, you will be happy to hear that you may use an ordinary dumbbell, which many already have in the back of the closet, and simply attach a handgrip or handle to the middle of it.

Kettlebell workout enthusiasts cite as some of the benefits of their workout routine their increased strength, balance, endurance as well as the cardiovascular benefits that the total-body workout yields for them. For those who are interested in giving it a try, here are some things to consider when purchasing your first set of kettlebells:

Be realistic about your own strength. Considering that the cannonball with the handle you will be purchasing is not just going to sit on the ground, but will actually be used in a variety of

exercises, it is important that you start out small and work your way up. Sizes vary and usually start out at 8 pounds.

Thereafter you will be able to purchase 16 lbs, 26 lbs, 35 lbs, 53 lbs, 70 lbs, 88 lbs and 105 lbs, yet unless you already are a professional strongman at the local circus, the latter four sizes should not matter too much to you. Most everyone will be able to do a good quality workout with a 16 pound or 26 pound bell.

Exercises can be varied: you may wish to do bench presses, rows, and curls with them. While these are the kinds of exercises that you will many at the gym do with dumbbells, it is important to note that the kettlebell will require you to also work on your sense of balance in addition to simply the strength aspect of lifting it.

Learn some new vocabulary. There is a whole world of kettlebell exercises out there, and it is important that you know the lingo. We are talking about swings, snatches, and cleans.

A swing is quite possibly the simplest exercise and great for beginners. You simply grab the kettlebell with one hand, and position it between your feet. Now you swing it behind you and then immediately reverse the direction of the thrust and swing it forward. Now switch hands and repeat.

A snatch takes a bit more practice, and it is important that you start out slow so you do not injure yourself. Begin like a swing, but instead of stopping when the forward motion, continue it until you reach shoulder height and then use your other hand to steady the bell while you move your driving arm overhead with the bell resting against the back of your driving hand. Your other hand's maneuvering will ensure that you do not bruise your wrist during the upward motion.

A clean is a similar maneuver, except that the bell will not go overhead, but instead stop at shoulder height, while pointing outward.

Once you master these exercises, you can now branch out into the more advanced forms of exercise. If you vary the exercises, you will be able to realize your fitness goals, such as a toned mid section, tightened abs, quads, and arms, increased strength, shoulder flexibility, and weight loss.

Additionally, the apparently awkward weights that you will be maneuvering around will more stabilizing muscles to be toned, and as a result your center of gravity will be much stronger and your ability to recent yourself as well. Those who participate in hands on sports, such as martial arts, football, hockey, or those who enjoy the gravity defying stunts of gymnastics and ballet will find kettlebell exercises well worth their while.

So go ahead and try something new. While the equipment is not new, you should rest assured that this crowd pleaser from the early days of the strongman routine is still around and what worked almost a hundred years ago to build muscle and awe the masses is sure to do it today.

Achieving the Best Gym Workout with Circuit Training

You have invested in a gym membership and you are excited about going on your first day. You inhale the smell of socks in the locker room and you know you have come to the right place: this will be the time that you will achieve your best ever gym workout and this is the gym that will help you do it!

Yet no sooner have you gone out on the floor, when a peculiar sight meets your eyes: there is a whole group of exercise aficionados sweating and working and scurrying from one machine and activity to the next with little or no rest. Reminiscent of squirrels jumping from tree to tree you wonder what is going on, until a veteran exerciser next to you whispers the magic words: circuit training.

Exactly what does circuit training entail? Well, the idea is to complete a varied amount of exercises with little rest in between. The goal is to work different muscle groups during the same workout without letting the heart rate go down too much while alternating the muscle groups.

For this reason you will see athletes at the gym who will jump rope for ten minutes, put it down and immediately go on to do sit-ups, followed by the stair master, followed by some barbell curls, and so on. For someone who first visits a gym this is a daunting sight, and may actually be quite discouraging.

Do you really need to go through all of this rigmarole to achieve the best gym workout? Well, truth be told, it will make your life a lot easier, and it will help you to stick to your exercise routine. Yet like everything else that has to do with exercise, there is a right way and a wrong way to go about circuit training.

Running around as if you are a squirrel will do nothing but stress you out unnecessarily. Additionally, many a personal trainer is of the firm belief that the perfect workout consists of twenty minutes of hard work, followed by ten minutes of cool down. So for those who are intimidated by the hour long workouts of the aficionados, don't be!

Here is the best way to have an effective, and fun, gym workout with circuit training:

Rome was not built in a day, and neither will be your body. Do not think that you have to do every station of the circuit every day. Instead, do two or three stations per workout, and make sure that you push yourself hard for at least twenty minutes.

For your thighs you can work on the stair climber, do squats, or use the leg press. Whatever you decide, make sure that you warm up properly first!

For your abs, do leg-lifts or pulses for as long as you can. Several of the ab exercise machines available at the gym work wonders.

For your chest simple pushups will do the trick.

To exercise your gluts, go ahead and do some more squats.

Hire a personal trainer for an hour and ask him (or her) to help you to develop a doable and reasonable circuit. Your trainer will not only help you to come up with some ideas, but will also suggest exercises the “flow” together, so that your workout is not an abrupt start and stop routine of different exercises. In addition to the foregoing, your trainer will also help you make sure that you develop good form in your workout so that you do not acquire bad habits early on in your gym workouts.

Once you have gotten familiar and comfortable with the circuit you have, you may wish to once again enlist the help of a trainer to design a second and third circuit for you to help you vary the exercises to keep the experiences fresh and challenging. Nothing will turn you into a couch potato faster than being bored with the exercise regimen you have set up!

As you can see, circuit training does not have to be the daunting task but can actually be a quite enjoyable activity that will ensure that you get the most out of your gym workout.

Can't Resist this Workout – Resistance Training for a Slimmer You

For a long time now you have monitored your expanding waist size and have contemplated that you will need to do something to control the expanding girth. Yet not until the pair of pants that fit the most comfortable suddenly becomes too snug are you ready to move out of your comfort zone and into the gym to do something about it. Yet, what kind of exercise will help you to get to a slimmer you?

Which workout will help you to shed some extra pounds while also helping you to get healthier and feel better overall? If you are still wondering about what to do, then resistance training may very well be the answer for you!

Resistance training has long been hailed as increasing an already athletic person's endurance, yet did you know that there is more to resistance training than just endurance? As a matter of fact, resistance training has long since been credited with increasing bone mineral density as well as enhancing connective tissues. Of course, another important benefit is the enhancement of muscle strength.

At this point you may wonder which kinds of activities are actually considered to be resistance trainings. While there is no hard and fast cut-off, it is generally accepted that an activity is considered to fall under the umbrella of resistance training if it seeks to overcome gravity in addition to being weight-bearing and perhaps also using free weights.

For example, climbing a flight of stairs with a set of dumbbells is considered to be resistance training. In the same vein, squats (with or without dumbbells), bicycling, and rowing fall into the category of resistance training, while those activities that specifically exercise extremities one at a time are preferred, since they will not permit you to favor one leg or arm above the other.

Of course, resistance training will result in a slimmer you relatively quickly. The other upside to this kind of exercise regimen is the fact that you will not need costly machines to achieve your goals. Here are some suggested workout routines that will help you to increase your strength while decreasing the spare tire you might be carrying around your midsection.

Work against gravity just by using your body. This can take the form of push-ups, sit-ups, or squats. Later on, you might try to do squats with free weights, such as dumbbells to add another dimension of difficulty to your workout. Start out small and always warm up well before doing any kind of workout! Gradually increase the number of push-ups, sit-ups, or squats you do.

If you want to get more serious about your resistance training, consider investing in some resistance bands. These are specifically designed to exercise certain muscle groups, and in addition they are color coded to permit you to advance from the beginner band to the more advanced bands, thereby giving you more variety in your workouts.

Do not feel the need to start out big with the most resisting band, but instead be realistic about where you are at fitness-wise, and gradually work up your way. Nothing is more frustrating than working with equipment that is not designed for your level of ability, and nothing will cause you to give up on your fitness goal of slimming down faster than feeling frustrated.

If you do have the money to invest in some equipment, and you also have the room to properly set it up, then a weight machine might not be a bad route to go. The variations of exercises and resistance settings are nearly endless, and you will be challenged anew whenever you so desire. If you do not have the money or room to purchase one of your own, check out your local gym or even the YMCA to find out what their facilities look like and if you could benefit from their equipment.

As you can see, resistance training will not only help you to slim down, but it will furthermore increase your health in ways you may not even notice right away. Yet your muscles, your tendons, and your bones will thank you, so go ahead and exercise! The only thing you have to lose is the weight!

Get a Lift from Hydraulic Exercise Equipment

To an engineer, hydraulics is the science of using liquids power to apply force to a specific object. To most other people, it's that tube on top of the doors in public buildings that keeps them from slamming shut too quickly. To the world of fitness, however, hydraulics is a variation in exercise equipment that can make a big difference in your workout.

Strength training is all about resistance. With free weights, you're fighting against the pull of gravity. With springs and rubber bands, you fight against their elasticity, their tendency to return to their original shape. When rowing a boat, you're fighting against the resistance of the water against the oar. It's not just how heavy something is; it's how much resistance you have to fight against. That is what strength training ultimately boils down to.

The same effect can be achieved with hydraulic cylinders or pistons. When you push or pull the bars on a hydraulic exercise machine, you have to exert a force to make the piston move. The main difference between hydraulic equipment and the exercise machines that use weights is that the amount of force needed to move the hydraulics varies not according to weight, but by how much force you apply.

If you try to work a hydraulic exercise machine quickly, it requires more force. If you try to move it slowly, it requires less. If you start to try to move it quickly, then realize you've bitten off more than you can chew, you can slow down mid-swing until you reach a resistance that is challenging but possible for you to do. Imagine trying to do that with an overloaded set of weights!

Many people prefer hydraulic exercise equipment to regular weight equipment because they can go at their own pace, and it leaves their muscles less sore than typical weights would. This factor makes it ideal for children, seniors, women, and people who are simply too daunted by the stacks of weights to try regular weight machines, although models are of course also designed for men and more advanced exercisers.

Also, since with hydraulic machines you do not have to lift heavy weights, you are less likely to overstrain yourself, or to need a spotter to help you get the weights back in place.

Hydraulic exercise machines are very popular right now in public fitness programs, since it means that people of varying levels of fitness can exercise together without having to worry about someone falling behind or running too far ahead.

Gyms and exercise franchises can get a wide variety of machines specialized for leg extensions, arm curls, shoulder presses, hip adductors, rotary torsos, biceps, and more, along with units that can be used to exercise many different muscle groups. However, there are not yet many models available for those consumers who would prefer to exercise at home, and those that can be found seem to cost about \$2000 or more.

The one exception may be the hydraulic rowing machines, which are less than a tenth of that price, but are considered to be of slightly lower quality than other types of rowing machines. (They still give you just as effective a workout; they just aren't quite as smooth at imitating a rowing movement.)

Hydraulic exercise equipment does have its drawbacks. As has been found with the rowing machine, you may find the machines to not move as smoothly as other exercise machines, especially if you cannot maintain a steady pressure as you push or pull, or with older or lower quality equipment that might have air bubbles within the fluids in the hydraulic cylinders.

There is also an upper limit to the amount of resistance most models can provide, which makes them less than desirable to more advanced athletes and bodybuilders. Finally, the price tag on most models, as well as the lack of selection for home consumers, makes them a poor choice for most home gyms.

There are many ways to provide a good strength-training workout, and hydraulic exercise equipment is one of them. However, if you have your heart set on hydraulics, it is probably better to join a gym or fitness program in which you can take advantage of their many quality machines and trainers, and choose something a little more versatile for your home.