

TAKE a look around you at the gym and you will notice that the majority of people there are either doing cardio exercises or working out their upper body. It is not as common to find someone doing any sort of training for their legs as those religiously building up the chest muscles or toning the biceps. This is mainly because working the lower limbs is not as glamorous as having toned masculine biceps or possessing an imposing chest. Legs could be hidden from view with long trousers as opposed to the upper limbs and body that are more likely to get noticed.

It is not difficult to spot someone who has been neglecting their legs in their workout, especially among men, as their lower body will look disproportionate to their upper half. Apart from looking “unsymmetrical”, there are other important aspects of resistance training for the legs which could really benefit you in the long run.

Studies conducted by the Pennsylvania State University Laboratory of Sports Medicine in 1998 by Loebel and Kramer show that performing high intensity strength training promotes the natural secretion of hormone testosterone in the human body. Testosterone is an important ingredient used in repairing and building human muscle. It is employed to synthesize proteins that rebuild the muscle fibres damaged from

From the ground up

In this fourth of a six-part series on building a healthier body, a master trainer talks about the benefits of working out the legs.

doing demanding weight training. Being the human body’s biggest muscle group, performing intense compound leg exercises stimulates more testosterone production as compared to doing an isolated, single-joint exercise or one for a smaller muscle group such as the biceps. The higher amount of testosterone secreted into the bloodstream by training the huge muscle mass of the legs would in turn result in better recovery of muscle tear or injury and assist in overall muscle building of the entire body.

Strength training the legs is very strenuous. A well-disciplined leg workout increases the metabolic rate. The increased usage of energy requires considerable number of calories to be burnt, hence selecting the right leg exercises with the appropriate intensity would greatly enhance lean muscle mass gain and promote fat loss.

Studies have also shown that doing resistance training would not only maintain muscle mass that deteriorates as we get older, but also help strengthen brittle or weak bones and delay the bone ageing



Cartoon character Mr Incredible had a disproportionate body.

process in older men and women. Doing high-intensity standing free-weight resistance training will increase physical stress on leg bones. The nervous system will process these stress signals and channel nutrients to these bones. This process is called bone remod-

elling (Robergs & Roberts, 1997). Specialists have long advocated strength training as a means to gradually reinforce weak bones and increase bone mineral density.

Strengthening the legs by providing good function of the quadriceps is also used in biomechanical treatment of posterior cruciated ligaments (PCL) without the requirements of surgery, and strength training has further shown to significantly improve the quality of life of knee osteoarthritis sufferers. Reinforcing the leg muscles at an early age can prevent osteoarthritis, but there is evidence that even in later stages, having a strong and adequately stabilized leg muscle would provide the support needed and divert pressure away from the injured knee or ligaments.

We use our legs every day for just about everything from standing up to walking, climbing steps and running. They carry our weight and whatever load that we may carry, transporting it from one place to another.

Whether you are strength training your legs to endure long-

distance running or trying to lose weight, it is best to do effective exercises that involve compound or multiple joint movement workouts. These are exercises that activate more than one muscle group in your legs such as the squats, lunges and machine leg press. These exercises target the biggest muscle groups of the legs, namely the quadriceps, hamstrings and glutes, simultaneously. There are other exercises that allow you to exclusively target the specific muscle group of the legs, for instance the hamstring curls and leg extensions. These are isolated exercises performed best after completing the compound exercises.

Since you are doing the same exercise regardless of the programme that you engage in – whether you are training to lose weight or to gain muscle mass – what differs from one programme to another are the other variables that are vital to your fitness regime. These include, but are not limited to, the intensity of the workout, the load that you bear, the repetitions, the recovery period, rests between sets, your nutritional intake as well as injuries or disabilities.

Do a bit of research before you start to train. Free information is readily available on the Internet. Seek professional assistance if necessary. If you want record keeping, motivation and guidance, hire a trainer, and always consult your physician to get his opinion or recommendations.