



Walk Kansas

a fitness challenge

K-State Research and Extension

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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Gain Strength with Simple Activities

Strength training is included in the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* for a very good reason: We can lose up to one-half of body strength and muscle mass between ages 25 and 80. Some of the loss is part of the aging process, but inactivity accounts for the rest.

The promising news is that progressive strength training can prevent muscle loss and even increase strength and muscle mass in adults and seniors. Strength training also can increase bone density. Like other forms of physical activity, strengthening exercises reduce the risk of diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, and arthritis. You can feel a difference when your body is stronger, and that difference contributes to a more positive outlook on life, as well as better sleep.

Do muscle-strengthening activities two to three days a week, with a "rest" day between. Work all major muscle groups including the legs, hips, back, stomach, chest, shoulders, and arms. You can alternate activities, using upper-body muscle groups one day and focusing on lower-body muscles the next time.

Following are exercises you can do at home or in a gym:

- **Free weights or dumbbells.** These are classic tools used to strengthen your upper body. They are inexpensive

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Gain Strength with Simple Activities

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and available in many sizes. Start with 2-, 3-, or 5-pound weights and gradually work up. Canned food products can serve double duty, so just pull something the appropriate size and weight from your cupboard. Milk jugs filled with water or sand also work. Secure the tops with duct tape and weigh the jug on a household scale. Adjust the weight as your fitness level changes.

- **Body weight exercises.** These require little or no equipment since they use your body weight for resistance. Try push-ups, pull-ups, abdominal crunches, and leg squats.

- **Resistance tubing.** This inexpensive option is widely available. Tubes offer weight-like resistance when you pull on them. These are good for building strength in arms and other muscles, and are available in varying degrees of resistance.

- Start slowly if you are new to strength training.
- Make sure you warm up with 5 to 10 minutes of stretching or walking. Choose an appropriate weight or resistance level that will challenge you.

- Each exercise set should include 12 repetitions, meaning you will lift the weight the same way 12 times in a row, then rest. Aim to perform 2 to 4 sets of 12 repetitions with each exercise.

- Work opposing muscle groups with each set to increase endurance and prevent early fatigue during your workout. For example, if you start with a set of exercises using your right arm, switch to the left and perform the same set. Then repeat with your right arm, and then switch back to the left again.

- See more information at: www.walkkansas.org
Look for "how to" videos for using weights and resistance bands linked on the *Steps to Fitness* page.

Grow Your Own Salad

A great way to enjoy the outdoors and work toward eating more veggies is to grow your own salad. Following are five quick tips to help you grow delicious greens.

1. Choose what kinds of salad greens you like. Do you prefer *spinach* or nice soft *lettuces*? Maybe you like some extra flavor and zing in your salads. You can find seed packets with just one type of lettuce or a mix of several colors and textures of lettuce. Other salad (or mesclun) mixes might include spicy Asian greens, such as Mizuna or mustards.

2. Find a spot for your salad garden. If you already have a garden – even an empty flower garden – just work up a patch of soil on a nice, warm March or

early April day. It doesn't have to be a row or any certain shape. Locate the plot in a sunny area. Just make sure you can reach the center. No garden space? An inexpensive plastic pot will do, along with some good potting mix. Salad greens enjoy a shallow (6- to 8-inch- deep) pot that is nice and wide.

3. Read the seed packet before planting your garden. Most salad greens can be planted in mid-March to mid-April in Kansas, but check the seed packet for specific directions and to find out about seed planting depth. Most seeds for salad greens are tiny. Plant them about 2 inches apart. If they end up too close, you can pick some of the plants early.

4. Keep your salad garden moist. If the season is a bit dry, you might need to water the plants to supplement spring rain.

5. Start harvesting your salad when the leaves look big enough to eat. Small leaves are usually more tender and sweet, but large leaves go further. You can pick the biggest leaves and let the plants keep growing for more salad a few days later.

For additional information, see *Growing Vegetables in Pots* online or ask for publication MF2873 at your local K-State Research and Extension office.

– Rebecca McMahan
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Greens: More than Rabbit Food

Rabbits enjoy greens and so should you. Salad greens contain vitamin A, vitamin C, beta-carotene, calcium, folate, fiber, and phytonutrients. Lettuce, the most commonly eaten leafy vegetable, provides about 7 calories in a 1-cup serving. Greens can add volume and nutrition to your diet, while contributing very few calories. Lettuce usually is served with an array of other vegetables, fruits, and protein. It can add crunch to sandwiches or hold fillings as a wrap.

Consumers are becoming more aware of the healthfulness of greens, which contributes to greater availability and variety in local supermarkets. Spinach and several types of lettuce have been the most commonly found. Now, consumers are eating kale, collard, Swiss chard, bok choy, and mesclun (French for a mixture of tender young lettuces).

You can do much more with greens than just toss them into the salad bowl. Try them steamed, sautéed, stir-fried, boiled, broiled, grilled, or baked. The good news is the greens' nutrient profile will stay about the same, regardless of cooking method used. Greens are water-rich, so cooking them concentrates the amount you consume. Raw greens can shrink from 50 to 75 percent when cooked, so consider the number of servings needed if you plan to cook them.

While all greens are good for you, select those that are dark green or dark red in color. Some will have a mild flavor and crisp texture. Others will have a tangy flavor that adds a nice bite to mixed salads. Enjoy variety and try salads with less dressing so you can see what your taste buds like best.

Did you know?

Iceberg, the most popular lettuce in the United States, is the least nutritious. It is mostly water and is low in nutritional value and flavor.

Iceberg's superior shipping qualities make it easily available to consumers. You can boost the nutritional punch of your salad foundation by mixing dark greens with iceberg lettuce.

Pear and Cranberry Salad with Grilled Beef Strips

Makes 4 Servings

12 ounces beef flat iron steak
½ teaspoon black pepper
2 cups spinach leaves, torn
4 cups mixed salad greens
2 medium pears, cored, cut into wedges

¼ cup dried cranberries
Salt (optional)
4 tablespoons feta cheese (optional)
¼ cup coarsely chopped pecans (optional)
Lite or nonfat raspberry vinaigrette dressing (optional)

Directions:

- 1) Season steak with ½ teaspoon pepper. Grill, broil, or cook steak in large, nonstick skillet to internal temperature of 145° F (medium rare) to 160° F (medium).
- 2) Meanwhile, divide greens evenly among 4 dinner plates. Top with pear wedges and dried cranberries.
- 3) Carve steak into thin slices and season with salt as desired. Divide steak slices on plates with salad. If desired, top each salad with feta cheese, pecans, and dressing.

Nutrition Information per Serving: (without feta and pecans)

Calories – 200; Fat – 7g; Carbohydrate – 15g;
Fiber – 4g; Protein – 20g; Sodium – 70mg

(with feta and pecans)

Calories – 280; Fat – 14g; Carbohydrate – 16g;
Fiber – 5g; Protein – 22g; Sodium – 180mg

