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Why Grip Strength Could Be the Key to a Longer Life



It's long been understood that higher muscle mass is linked to a reduced risk of all-cause mortality. But in recent years, one specific strength measure has captured growing attention: grip strength.

Surprisingly, grip strength may be a better predictor of life expectancy than even blood pressure. So should we be trading in our at-home blood pressure cuffs for hand dynamometers? Let's take a closer look.

Why Is Grip Strength Getting So Much Attention?

Grip strength is a powerful indicator of your overall strength, which in turn reflects your level of skeletal muscle mass—a major factor in determining lifespan. While simply increasing your grip strength won't directly make you live longer, building strength through regular resistance training certainly can.

A study led by the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Center at the University of Michigan examined the link between grip strength and epigenetic age—a biological measure of how fast you're aging. Among more than 1,200 participants, those with weaker grip strength showed signs of accelerated aging at the cellular level. Their DNA appeared “older,” making them more vulnerable to illness and more likely to experience earlier mortality.

Grip strength also serves as an early warning sign for future disability. Maintaining both muscle and joint function is essential for preserving independence, especially as we age. While it's never too late to build strength, starting in your 20s, 30s, and 40s sets a strong foundation for long-term health.

How to Improve Grip Strength

The good news: if you're lifting weights consistently, you're probably already strengthening your grip. Exercises involving barbells, dumbbells, and kettlebells naturally recruit the muscles of the hands and forearms, especially as the weight increases.

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Want to specifically target your grip—and maybe build some impressive forearms along the way? Try these proven methods:

1. Carries

Farmer's carries are one of the simplest, most effective grip exercises. Choose weights that are 25–50% of your body weight in each hand. Stand tall with your arms straight, shoulders down, and chest lifted, then walk in a controlled, steady gait for 40–100 yards. Variations include single-arm (unilateral) carries or dead hangs from a pull-up bar. For dead hangs, start by holding for 10–20 seconds and build up over time.

2. Deadlifts

Deadlifts aren't just great for your back and legs—they're a major test of grip strength. In fact, grip is often the limiting factor when it comes to progressing in this lift. Some lifters switch to a mixed grip to pull heavier weights, but training your grip specifically (using accessories like carries) will help you progress without needing to rely on alternate grips.

3. Plate Pinches

A throwback favorite from many a weight room, plate pinches target the smaller muscles, tendons, and ligaments in your fingers and hands. Start light, hold weight plates together between your fingers and thumb, and build your time as your strength increases.

Looking Beyond the Gym

If you're looking for a fun way to boost grip strength outside the weight room, consider climbing or bouldering. These sports demand engagement from nearly every muscle group, build serious core strength, and—yes—deliver forearms of steel.

Final Thoughts

No matter how you train, one truth remains: getting stronger only brings benefits. Whether your goal is to improve daily function, increase longevity, or simply feel better in your body, building strength—grip included—should be a lifelong pursuit