Weight Training Over 40: You Don’t Have to Stop—You Have to Train Smarter

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Stop fooling yourself.

If you are over 40, you cannot expect to train and recover exactly the way you did when you were 20 or 30.

That doesn’t mean you should stop lifting weights. In fact, I believe strength training becomes even more important as we get older. But there is a difference between **training hard** and **training recklessly**—and sometimes it takes an injury to teach us that lesson.

I learned it the hard way.

I’m 53 years old. I’m a former wrestler, former high school and Division I college football player, and a black belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. For the past 15 years, I have owned Training for Warriors Albuquerque, where I have coached people of different ages and abilities with a focus on building strength, improving body composition, developing better nutrition habits, and maintaining lean muscle.

Training has been part of my life for decades.

And for most of those decades, my mentality was simple:

Push harder.

When Your Mind Is 25 but Your Body Isn't

Over the past several years, I started noticing something different about my own training.

I wasn't recovering as quickly.

Workouts that I once bounced back from easily were taking longer to recover from. Little aches stuck around. My body was giving me information.

The problem was that I wasn't listening.

Despite recognizing that my recovery had changed, I continued pushing myself much the same way I had 15 years earlier when I first opened my gym.

Like many lifelong athletes, I've had my share of injuries—muscle pulls, tweaks, concussions, bruises and everything in between. You learn the difference between an annoying injury you can work around and something more serious.

Historically, I had always bounced back relatively quickly.

Then came August 2025.

The Rep That Changed My Training

I was working out with my 7 a.m. class in the weight room at Training for Warriors Albuquerque.

We had an upper-body workout programmed, and as I often do, I was training alongside my students. I believe in leading by example.

I warmed up as usual and eventually made my way to the incline bench press.

I was on my third set.

On the fourth repetition, as I pressed the weight away from my chest—

POP.

I heard and felt something in my right shoulder.

Pain shot through my triceps and down toward my lat like an electrical current.

Fortunately, I was able to rack the weight safely.

I stood up and walked away from the bench, trying to figure out what had just happened.

My mind told me:

You're fine.

My body was telling me something completely different.

I had a cold sensation running through me, and somewhere inside I knew this wasn't just another tweak.

But the former athlete in me took over.

I went back to the bench.

I was going to finish my last set.

Then reality hit me directly in the face.

I couldn't get the bar off the rack.

That's when I knew I was injured.

“But My Shoulder Never Hurt”

What confused me most was that I hadn't experienced any warning signs.

No chronic shoulder pain.

No obvious weakness.

No major mobility problems.

Nothing that made me think my right shoulder was on the verge of an injury.

It seemingly came out of nowhere.

A couple of weeks later, I made an appointment with my chiropractor. Based on his evaluation, he told me I might have injured my rotator cuff, but we wouldn't know exactly what was happening without imaging.

Eventually, I had an MRI.

The results were eye-opening.

What the MRI Revealed

My MRI didn't identify one simple problem.

It revealed several issues.

There was **severe glenohumeral osteoarthritis**, including significant cartilage damage—severe chondromalacia—particularly toward the back of the shoulder joint, along with large posterior osteophytes, commonly called bone spurs.

The MRI also identified **circumferential degenerative tearing of the labrum**, meaning the cartilage structure surrounding the shoulder socket had degenerative tearing extending around the joint.

My **subscapularis tendon**, one of the four rotator-cuff tendons, had a low-grade interstitial tear involving the upper fibers at its attachment, along with mild-to-moderate tendinosis.

Fortunately, this was not a full-thickness tear.

There was also good news: my **supraspinatus, infraspinatus and teres minor were intact**, and there was no significant rotator-cuff muscle atrophy or fatty infiltration reported.

The MRI also showed significant degenerative tearing and thinning involving my long-head biceps tendon. That particular injury was old, and I currently have full strength in the biceps.

There was also an approximately **7-millimeter loose body** near the front of the shoulder socket, moderate fluid within the shoulder joint, changes involving the capsule and ligament structures, and mild degeneration of the AC joint.

In other words, there was a lot happening inside a shoulder that hadn't been giving me much warning.

The Lesson Wasn't “Stop Training”

My chiropractor knows me well enough to understand that telling me to stop training wasn't going to work.

Instead, his message was:

Stop pushing through pain.

That distinction changed the way I approached my recovery.

He reminded me of something that has stuck with me:

When you're rehabilitating an injury, half a rep is still a rep.

You don't have to prove anything.

You work within the range your body currently gives you and progressively rebuild from there.

So I started modifying my workouts.

I began taking my physical therapy more seriously and performing it twice per week. We worked on strengthening areas surrounding the shoulder that needed additional support.

Gradually, my shoulder became stronger and more functional, and the pain became more manageable.

I didn't quit training.

I changed how I trained.

And that may be one of the most important lessons I've learned as an athlete and coach.

After 40, Recovery Is Part of Training

When we're younger, many of us think the workout is the training.

It's not.

The workout is only one part of the process.

Training + nutrition + recovery + consistency = the bigger picture.

As we age, we have to become better at listening to our bodies.

That doesn't mean treating yourself like you're fragile.

It means understanding the difference between discomfort from hard training and pain that is telling you something isn't right.

There's no trophy for ignoring an injury until you can no longer train.

There is also no prize for trying to lift what you lifted 20 years ago simply because your ego tells you that you should still be able to do it.

The goal changes.

At 20, maybe you're trying to prove how strong you are.

At 40, 50, 60 and beyond, I believe the bigger objective should be:

How long can I remain strong?

Don't Use Age as an Excuse to Stop

There is another side to this message that is equally important.

Getting older is **not** an excuse to stop exercising.

An injury isn't automatically a reason to give up.

Sometimes you need medical evaluation. Sometimes you need physical therapy. Sometimes an exercise needs to be modified or eliminated. Sometimes you need to decrease the weight, change the range of motion, improve technique or give an injured area time to recover.

The answer isn't always to stop moving.

It's to figure out how you can **continue moving appropriately**.

That may mean replacing one exercise with another.

It may mean using lighter weight.

It may mean shortening your range of motion temporarily.

It may mean spending more time warming up.

It may mean taking an additional recovery day.

And sometimes it means putting your ego aside and getting evaluated by a qualified healthcare professional.

That's not weakness.

That's how you stay in the game.

Train for the Next 30 Years

We are all aging.

None of us gets to negotiate that part.

But we do have some influence over **how we age**.

That's why my philosophy toward training has changed.

I'm no longer interested only in what I can lift today.

I'm interested in what my body will allow me to do at 60, 70 and beyond.

I want to continue lifting.

I want to continue coaching.

I want to continue practicing Jiu Jitsu.

I want to be physically capable.

And I want the same thing for the people I coach.

That requires strength—but it also requires enough wisdom to know when to push and when to modify.

Your 40s, 50s and 60s don't have to be the decades when you surrender your strength.

They can be the decades when you finally understand **why you're building it.**

So train.

Build muscle.

Stay active.

Eat well.

Recover.

Get professional guidance when something hurts or doesn't feel right.

Modify when necessary.

But most importantly:

DON'T QUIT.

We can't stop ourselves from getting older.

But we can decide how we're going to approach getting older.

Stay strong, my friends.

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