



Group of women perform step aerobics, popular in the 1980s, Getty Images

Women and Weightlifting: A New Era

From the hula hooping of the 1950s to the jazzercise of the 1970s, women's fitness trends have come a long way. Now more than ever, increasing numbers of women are lifting heavy weights in the gym. The shift in women's fitness trends has been a journey of empowerment, defying societal expectations, and rewriting fitness norms. Now, instead of striving to be skinny and small, women are training to be strong. In this story, we will explore how the rise in women lifting weights has sparked a physical and mental revolution, strengthening women's bodies, minds, and sense of community.



Krissy Cela, fitness influencer and business owner, poses for an ad campaign for her activewear brand, *Oner Active*

“Women are now taking up space in the gym like never before.”

In the past, weightlifting was seen as unfit for women because of the idea that it would make them look “bulky” or “unfeminine.” Additionally, society was less accepting of the women being strong or being in the same spaces as men. However, with the changing of societal roles for women, fitness trends have changed with them. Women are taking up space in gyms like never before, competing in weightlifting, and participating in sports like Hyrox and Cross-Fit. These new trends represent a new form of expression and empowerment for women.

With the rise of social media, information about the benefits of weightlifting has reached millions of women across the globe. Influencers like Whitney Simmons and Krissy Cela create content across many platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram to share their expertise with their audience. This content ranges from weightlifting tips, workout plans, and meal inspiration. Whitney Simmons, in particular, posts her “Mic-Up Seshes,” taking her viewers through workouts with explanations. Krissy Cela started her career by posting YouTube videos and now manages two multi-million dollar brands. She is CEO of *Oner Active*, an activewear brand that empowers women through strength training and co-founder of the *EvolveYou* App that provides personalized workout plans.

Both these women have made great strides for women in fitness, educating and encouraging through their media content and beyond. These creators along with thousands of others have influenced particularly younger women and teens to start lifting weights and going to the gym. Social media has made fitness information accessible for people of all expertise.



Freshman, Hanmo Yang, gets a quick workout in between classes at the Pepperdine Fitness Center

Freshman at Pepperdine University, Hanmo Yang, comments on how social media influencers have changed her perception of fitness. Hanmo says “I follow influencers like Maria Carvajal and Haley Fernandez because watching their discipline motivates me to get up in the morning.” Hanmo speaks on how lifting differs from other forms of exercise, claiming “Lifting has made me so confident and my body. It’s nice to have an outlet where I can progress every single time and see the rewards.” Hanmo represents just one of many women in college who have been inspired by fitness influencers and the spread of information about the benefits of lifting.



Freshman at Pepperdine University, Laura Summers, trains her hamstrings in her university's gym

Freshman at Pepperdine University, Laura Summers started weightlifting in 2020 and has observed gym culture over the years. Laura comments about the changes she has noticed in the gym environment, saying “I feel like in the past, the majority of women including myself were only using the cardio machines, but now I see more women in the weights section.” This shift in forms of exercise for women is indicative of the power of social media, new research, and influencers to facilitate widespread change.

However, just because lifting is increasing in popularity doesn't mean that other forms of exercise are being neglected. Senior at Pepperdine University, Victoria Snapper explains that “I like mixing up my workouts. I think lifting is beneficial, but I don't want to completely neglect cardio and mobility movements.”

“It's nice to have an outlet where I can progress every single time and see the rewards.”

- Hanmo Yang

Weightlifting is incredibly important for everyone, but particularly for younger women. As women age and hormone production slows, it becomes very difficult to maintain muscle mass. Therefore, it is crucial for younger women to gain muscle early in life to support them in their older years. In addition to building muscle, weightlifting has also been proven to balance

hormone levels, improve metabolism, and reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

In an emotional aspect, lifting can reduce stress and anxiety while also improving focus and motivation, increasing performance in other areas of life. Overall, lifting supports every area of health: physical and mental, helping support a longer and more enjoyable life.

Through this revolution of weightlifting, the terms “strong” and “feminine” go hand in hand. Fitness trends are encouraging women to be strong, rather than just skinny. Propelled by social media, influencers, and new research, the benefits of lifting are coming to light. Women all over the world of every age are learning how to weightlift for muscle growth: how much to lift, how often to lift, and how to eat to support their goals.

Younger women are now filling up weight sections in college gyms like never before, pushing themselves to get better, and taking up space in a previously male dominated space. This new generation of young women who weightlift are preparing to live a happier and healthier life thanks to the all of benefits that lifting provides.

STRONG

like a

WOMAN



How weightlifting has
changed the narrative of
womens' fitness