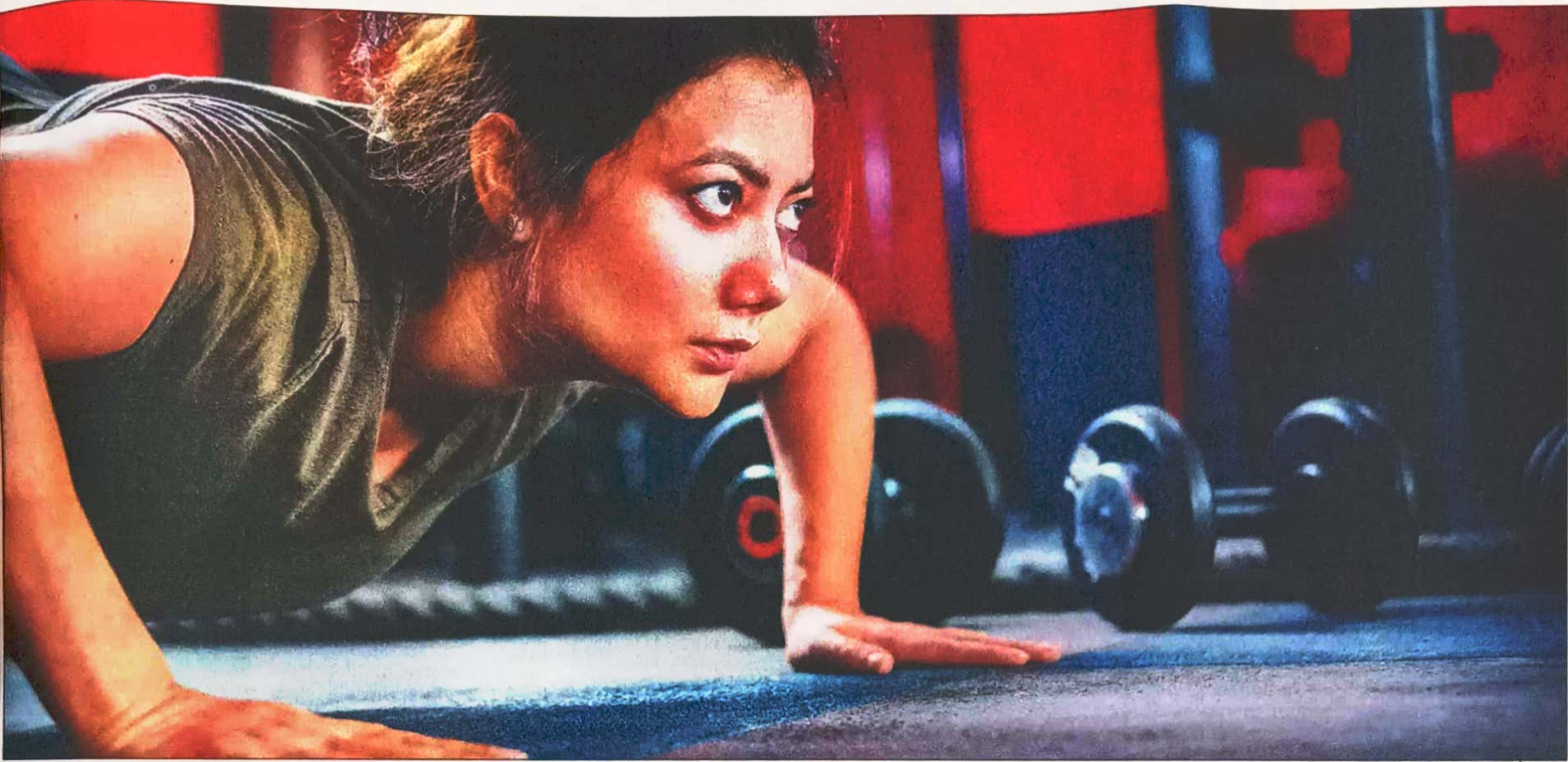


Make time for cardio

Strength training is good but combining it with aerobic exercise can be more effective. **Danielle Friedman** has the story



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Strength training has surged in popularity in recent years, and for good reason — a growing body of research suggests that maintaining muscle is vital to healthy ageing. This buzz has led some people to prioritise strength training over aerobic exercise, said Dr Julia Iafrate, a sports medicine physician at NYU Langone Health, US.

There's been a "pendulum swing" toward muscle-building workouts, she said, in part because strength training can be more time-efficient and can lead to more visible results than cardio, she said.

While major health organisations recommend two sessions of strength training and 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity per week, many people struggle to carve out the time to exercise at all.

We asked exercise and sports medicine experts to explain what you might be missing if you focus exclusively on strength training.

Strength training alone brings many health benefits. It helps you maintain strong muscles, which increases your chances of staying active and independent as you age. It can also protect against osteoporosis and lower your risk of falls.

Regular muscle-strengthening exercise can improve other key health markers, too, including your cardiovascular

health, said Dr Christopher Tanayan, a sports cardiologist at Northwell Health in New York, US. It can lower your blood pressure and improve your cholesterol, and lower your risk of diabetes, heart attack, stroke and some cancers.

On its own, strength training can lower your risk of death from any cause by about 15 per cent. "That's not nothing," Dr Iafrate said.

But cardio builds the engine that will keep you going. To maximise your chances of living a long and healthy life, you need aerobic exercise, Dr Tanayan said. By only strength training, he added, "you're leaving something on the table, in terms of longevity".

Moderate to vigorous aerobic exercise — where you can still talk, but have to catch your breath between sentences — stresses your heart in ways that help it become more efficient. It also keeps your blood vessels healthy and can help you grow new blood vessels throughout your body.

Over time, your cardiovascular system is better able to deliver oxygen to your muscles and organs, which helps nearly every body system function more optimally. Without regular aerobic exercise, your heart becomes less efficient and your blood vessels shrink and deteriorate, Dr Tanayan said.

Kate Baird, a clinical exercise physiol-

ogist at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, US, suggested thinking of your body like a car. It can look great on the outside, she said, but "you can't forget that there's an engine inside that also needs to be able to drive it down the street at the speed that you'd like".

In other words, she said, regardless of how strong and resilient your muscles, bones and joints are, if your cardiovascular system is suffering, "eventually, you're going to have to slow down".

Regularly elevating your heart rate can also make everyday activities — like climbing stairs, walking uphill or running for a bus — feel easier.

A large body of evidence has found that aerobic exercise protects against cardiovascular disease, which is the leading cause of death for both men and women. Some research suggests that strength training offers similar protection, though this connection hasn't been studied as extensively. Aerobic exercise also protects against many types of cancer.

But the most effective workout routine combines strength training with cardio. When you do both, your risk of dying from any cause drops by at least 40 per cent compared with doing no exercise. That's "astronomical", Dr Iafrate said.

"No peptide is going to get that for you. No biohacking is going to get that for you."

If getting 150 minutes of aerobic exercise a week feels impossible, try incorporating short bouts of aerobic exercise into your strength sessions, said Anne Brady, a professor of kinesiology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, US.

For example, spend 10 to 15 minutes before a strength workout on an exercise bike, treadmill or elliptical. You can also do high-intensity calisthenic exercises like jumping jacks, jump rope or high knees.

Look for ways to add bursts of cardio throughout your day. If you're out walking, pick up your pace to get your heart beating faster. Or take a break from sitting at your desk with "exercise snacks" — a few minutes of high-intensity movement that gets your heart pumping.

Brady also recommended circuit training that involves alternating between strength and aerobic exercises with little to no rest time in between. This type of workout conditions your cardiovascular system more effectively than traditional strength training, she said.

While any exercise is better than no exercise, the experts said, if you want to reap the most benefits from moving your body, building in time for cardio is well worth it.

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