

Grip strength - why does it matter?

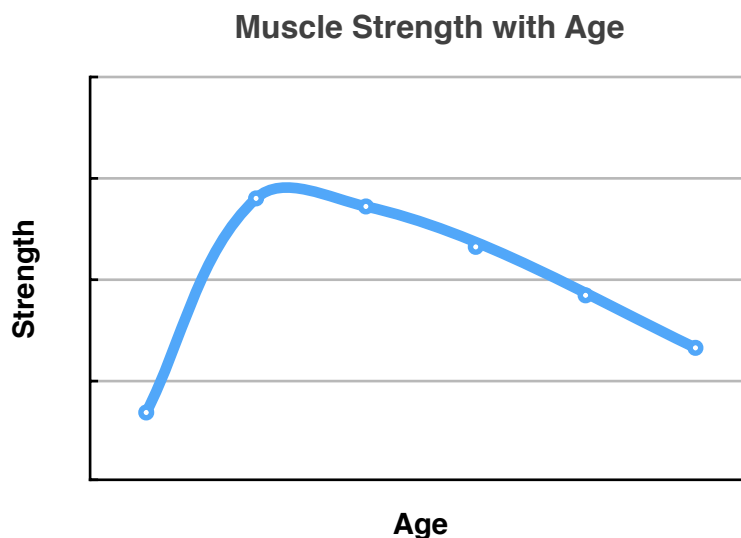
The grip strength test

The grip strength test is a simple quick measurement taken with a piece of equipment known as a dynamometer. It measures the force of your muscles when gripping. Not everyone's grip strength is the same, the 'average' range for you will depend on your age, gender and ethnicity.



Why measure grip strength?

The grip strength test is more than just a measure of how strong your handgrip or forearm muscles are, it has also been shown to be a **good indicator of overall body strength**. Muscle strength is important for your health and well-being at any age, but even more so in later life. Your muscles reach their peak strength in the 20s to 30s, but then start to decline in your 40s, losing around 10% a decade. A loss of muscle mass and strength significantly impacts on your ability to look after yourself in later life.



The **good news is you can do something about it** by keeping physically active and using exercises to counteract the muscle ageing process.

Why else is muscle strength important?

Strengthening exercises help to:

- protect your joints against injury.
- improve regulation of blood sugars
- lowers blood pressure and improves cardiovascular health

- protect against osteoporosis
- recent studies indicate strengthening exercises might also help your brain health and memory.

What else can grip strength tell you?

1. It's suggested grip strength may be linked to **heart health**, with a low grip strength being an indicator of increased risk of cardiovascular disease.
2. It also gives an indication of how well you are eating and fuelling your body. If you are not getting a balanced diet your grip strength may be lower, whereas it is suggested omega-3 fatty acids can improve it as they play a role in building muscle strength.
3. If you smoke it will affect the ability of your body to build and maintain muscle quality, this will be reflected in a lower than normal grip strength.
4. It is a good predictor of mobility and frailty in later life, a strong grip strength indicates a reserve capacity to help prevent this.
5. It may be a good way of assessing 'biological age', that is a way of telling us if our body is functioning better or worse than we would expect for your real age.
6. Regular grip strengthening exercises have been found to lower blood pressure.

What can I do to improve my muscle strength?

BE MORE ACTIVE..... NHS guidelines recommend strengthening exercises at least twice a week for all the major muscle groups in your body. You can do this by using weights, resistance bands, body weight, yoga, gardening or sport. If strengthening exercises are new to you start gradually and ask for advice.

Links to more helpful information

- Refer to our exercise resources signposted in your dedicated webpage.
- NHS UK Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults. <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/fitness/Pages/physical-activity-guidelines-for-adults.aspx>
- Prognostic value of grip strength: findings from the Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology (PURE) study; The Lancet, Volume 386, No 9990, p266-273, 18 July 2015.

Information provided by Janet Lowe.

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