Get a Grip to Protect Your Health

When Kacy Cantanzaro stepped up to the starting line of the American Ninja Warrior obstacle course, she was clearly an underdog. In the six-year history of the NBC reality show, no woman had ever completed the course. And at just five feet tall, weighing 100 pounds, every obstacle looked formidable.

Completing each obstacle on the course would require speed, balance, agility, and most of all, vice-like grip strength. Moving quickly from step to step, she cleared the first obstacle. Her iron-like grip and gymnastics background helped her through the next two obstacles. Then she cleared the cargo net. Hanging from a set of rings, her grip strength helped her move from peg to peg until she reached the final obstacle—a steeply sloped 14-foot wall.

She stepped back and took a deep breath. The crowd began chanting, “Beat the wall! Beat the wall!” She sprinted towards the wall, up the ramp, and jumped. Her fingers grazed the top of the wall, but she wasn’t high enough to grab on. She stumbled backwards, and the crowd went silent. Then she stared up at the 14-foot wall for just a moment before getting another running start. This time she jumped high enough to grip the top of the wall and climb over.

She screamed. The crowd cheered. And even the host and veteran NFL football player, Akbar Gbaja-Bjami, was stunned. “I’ve seen greatness during my NFL career,” he said. “And I’ve been in awe of people, but I am really in awe of Kacy.”

Kacy’s athletic background and success as a collegiate-level gymnast certainly helped her conquer this obstacle course. But ultimately, it was her grip strength that carried her through every obstacle to the top of the wall.

You may not be planning on becoming a ninja warrior, but did you know that increasing your grip strength can have a major impact on your health and longevity? Take this month-long Health Challenge and Get a Grip to Protect Your Health.

How Much Do You Know About Grip Strength? Take this quiz to find out.

1. [ ] Grip strength is an indicator of your overall body strength and muscle mass.
2. [ ] Mortality, disability, and the likelihood of future health problems can be predicted by measuring grip strength.
3. [ ] Poor nutrition and eating habits can have a negative impact on grip strength.
4. [ ] Increasing grip strength can have a positive effect on cognitive function.
5. [ ] Simple exercises and physical activity that engage the large muscle groups can help increase grip strength.
6. [ ] Grip strength is only important for weight lifters and athletes.

If you answered any of these statements incorrectly, you could benefit from learning more about grip strength. Studies show that measuring grip strength is an effective way to gauge your overall health and predict future health problems. Some doctors even measure the grip strength of patients during office visits just like checking your temperature and blood pressure.


Video: Grip strength helps Kacy Cantanzaro conquer obstacle course tinyurl.com/ptpj8z

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Research on the Benefits of Grip Strength

Open a jar of pickles. Give a firm handshake. Grab a shovel to dig a hole. Each of these basic activities, and many others, require grip strength. But is there any connection between grip strength and overall health? Researchers have been studying this for decades, and several interesting findings have emerged.

In a recent study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, researchers measured the grip strength of 555 seniors during a four-year period. They found that people with poor or declining grip strength died earlier than those who were stronger. They also found that grip strength predicted the likelihood of developing a disability.

In a separate study published in the journal Age and Ageing, researchers examined hundreds of studies on grip strength and sarcopenia (muscle loss that occurs with age). They found that measuring grip strength helped determine if muscle loss was occurring at a faster rate than normal. Identifying this early helped people take action to improve grip strength and their health.

Other studies have found that grip strength can reflect bone health and nutritional deficiencies. Poor grip strength has even been linked to longer hospital stays, increased stroke risk, and mental decline.

Ways to Get a Grip on Better Health

While grip strength is an important indicator of your overall health, it doesn’t mean you need to invest in those spring-loaded hand grippers or learn to tear phone books in half. Regular aerobic exercise combined with strength training will make you stronger and healthier. Maintaining a strong grip is one more way to help you stay active. Here are some ways to increase your grip strength:

- Squeeze a tennis ball or stress ball while on the phone or watching TV. Grip it tightly for 5, 10, or 15 seconds. Then rest and repeat.
- Handwrite letters to family and friends instead of sending an email or texting. Writing a letter with a pen or pencil engages 27 muscles in your hand and fingers.
- Make something with clay or putty. You’ll use grip strength to knead, squeeze, and shape the clay.
- Try rock climbing.
- Learn to play an instrument like the trumpet or piano that require finger, hand, and grip strength.
- Take up sports like bowling, baseball, golf, and tennis where your grip is essential to holding the ball, or gripping a club, bat, or racket.
- At home, grip a heavy object like a thick book or jug of water and carry it around.
- When waiting in line, hold your purse, backpack, suitcase, or bag in your hand, instead of setting it down or hanging it over your shoulder.

If you’re still looking for ways to increase your grip strength, try milking cows, or go ahead and get one of those spring-loaded hand grippers.

When you make the effort to eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and pay attention to your grip strength, you’ll feel better, stay active as you age, and live longer.

Instructions
1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of days you work on increasing your grip strength.
3. Use the calendar to record the actions and choices you made to make increasing and maintaining your grip strength become a regular part of your life.
4. At the end of the month, total the number of days you worked on increasing or maintaining your grip strength. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

Monthly Health Challenge™
Get a Grip to Protect Your Health

MONTH: 
HC = Health Challenge™  ex. min. = exercise minutes

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_______ Number of days this month I worked on increasing my grip strength
_______ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity

Other wellness projects completed this month:

________________________________________________________

Signature __________________________ Date __________________

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