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**MT Department of Public Health & Human Services**

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## Extension Agents Help Women Get Strong for Life's Heavy Lifting

Ah August in Montana! The final month of summer means lots of physical activity for Montanans - outdoor fun as well as plenty of farm, ranch, and garden work. Thanks to a series of classes taught by Extension agents across the state, many older women are now better able to handle the challenges of daily living.

"Since 2007, over 400 Montana women have enhanced their strength and improved their health with MSU Extension's *StrongWomen*<sup>™</sup> program," says Lynn Paul, PhD, RD (registered dietitian), Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist at MSU in Bozeman. "These classes, taught by me and 23 Extension agents in 15 counties, have been a tremendous boost for how participants feel and what they are able to do. Our research, conducted with Dr. Rebecca Sequin from Tufts University, has documented improvements in strength, balance, endurance, and sleep, as well as reduction in pain from arthritis and other conditions."

The Extension agents who lead *StrongWomen*<sup>™</sup> classes enthusiastically practice what they preach, since they are all required to do strength training themselves. They have numerous stories to share about the benefits of the classes from all corners of the Treasure State.

- **Jona McNamee, Cascade County:** A striking benefit of *StrongWomen*<sup>™</sup> classes is that participants do not break bones when they take a tumble down the stairs or slip on ice in the winter. Stronger muscles help protect our aging bones, plus we actually teach women how to protect themselves in a fall. I also often hear that women in our classes sleep better at night and have fewer aches and pains during the day.
- **Barb Andreozzi, Deer Lodge County:** Ages in our classes range from 42 to 90, with an average around 70 years 'young.' I constantly hear that the participants are able to get back to doing things that they used to do - carrying 25 pound bags of dog food, pulling clothes over their heads easily, and keeping their balance on uneven ground. In many ways, these classes help people maintain an active, healthy, independent lifestyle.
- **Jane Wolery, Teton County:** For me personally, one of the biggest benefits is sleeping better at night. And, researchers have discovered that sleep is very important for both our mental and physical health. Our participants also report quicker recovery from accidents, like falling off a horse, and wonderful improvements in their endurance for the outdoor activities they love, like fly fishing.

"The evaluations for MSU Extension's *StrongWomen*<sup>™</sup> classes have been extremely positive. Overall, the participants rate the class 9.7 on a scale of 1 to 10," notes Paul. "That's why we are doing research to learn how best to deliver programs like this in rural areas of Big Sky country." If you want to be stronger and feel better this fall, Dr. Paul recommends these ways to get into a strength training groove:

- **Contact your county MSU Extension Office to find out about upcoming *StrongWomen*<sup>™</sup> classes.**
- **Visit *StrongWomen*<sup>™</sup> online ([www.strongwomen.com/](http://www.strongwomen.com/)) for a variety of follow-along fitness programs.**
- **Look for local strength training programs through fitness centers or certified personal trainers.**

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at [www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm)