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Vibrating Machines Make a Comeback

by Carrie Myers Smith

Remember the old films of women getting major middle-jiggles on art deco-esque "reduction machines"? As amazing as it may seem, vibrating machines are making a comeback.

The idea of increasing the benefits of strength training through what's now called whole-body vibration, or WBV, is gaining attention from researchers, and it's landed in training programs from the National Football League's to NASA's. Now WBV is showing up in gyms (such as the New York Sports Club chain) and in rehab centers with the promise of increasing your strength, balance, and bone density. And research is backing up those claims, although it also shows that you won't lose weight or body fat from all that shaking.

One small University of Miami School of Medicine study, for example, found that participants increased their quad strength by 8 percent and their hamstring strength by 6 percent after just 6 minutes on the WBV platform. And Belgian researchers found that women who underwent WBV training gained just as much muscle strength (up to about 24 percent) as those who did a combination of cardio and strength training. There are more studies on WBV in the works, including one by William J. Kraemer, PhD, professor of kinesiology at the University of Connecticut and editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*; he's looking at its use in resistance training. For now, though, experts recommend using WBV training as a supplement to your current workout program, not in place of it.

Here's how it works: First, you stand on what looks like a small vibrating platform with a set of handlebars attached to it. Then, you either simply hang out or do some strength-training exercises while the machine vibrates your body, causing your muscle fibers to contract like they do when you're lifting weights, but at a much higher rate. (Some machines also move back and forth like a see-saw, challenging your balance to help target core muscles.) To get an idea of the sensation, think of how it feels to hold a pair of electric hair clippers while they're in action. Then translate that to your legs and feet. The straighter you stand, the higher and stronger you'll feel the vibrations. But the goal isn't to set your whole body quivering; in fact, it's better to bend your knees slightly to keep the vibrations in your lower half, where they're most beneficial.

If your gym doesn't have a WBV unit yet, there's a good chance it will soon. When it does, limit your tremor time to less than 10 minutes a couple times a week, since researchers aren't sure yet about the safety of longer durations. (Just be sure to check with your doctor first, and stay away from WBV altogether if you're pregnant.) If you'd rather quake in your own living room, companies like VibraFlex and Power Plate sell home models, but you'll have to shell out around \$3,000 for the privacy.

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