

You are never too old to.....

By Judy Creighton

The Canadian Press

At age 75, Sarah Thompson doesn't need to be told about the benefits of pumping iron.

She has been lifting weights for 17 years — and has the physique to prove it.

Twice a week, Thompson works out at a converted garage that serves as home to the Apollo Barbell Club in Belleville, Ont.

Weightlifting has given her "the strength of a 25-year-old," she says.

Recent studies at the University of Western Ontario indicate that weight training for seniors as old as 80 or 90 can bring dramatic improvements in muscle strength and flexibility.

"The exciting thing about strength training is that it does seem anyone can do it, even those with medical conditions," says Tony Vandervoort, a physical therapy professor at Western.

Thompson actually had a "medical condition" which led her to take up

PUMP IT UP

weight training.

At age 57 she suffered a stroke that led to complete loss of sight.

"Once I got out of hospital I was just so angry with the world and myself," she explained in an interview from her home. "I said, 'You are going to do something about this, you're not going to sit around and take it,' and I got out there fighting."

Thompson can now lift 100 kilograms from a squat and bench-press 50 kilograms. But she is quick to acknowledge that "if somebody told me I was going to do this 20 years ago, I would have thought they were crazy."

In 1988, a study at Tufts University in Boston looked at the effects of weight training on people aged 60 to 72. The subjects trained at the same intensity as young people.

Both groups, young and old, gained strength at the same pace — about five per cent per training day.

Vandervoort says that even seniors who exercise regularly — walking, doing aerobics or cross-country skiing — may find that a weight program aimed at strengthening muscles will help them in their daily activities.

"The reason for this is that muscle

tissue is very adaptable to whatever demands are placed on it."

This adaptability is present even in 90-year-olds, Vandervoort says.

Community gyms such as the YMCA as well as commercial fitness facilities must address the physical needs of a growing seniors' population, he adds.

"What is needed is more information and training for staff and instructors on showing older people how to lift weights properly and how to exercise while working around a disability such as heart disease, arthritis or osteoporosis."

Also, developers planning retirement complexes and seniors' residences would be wise to include fitness facilities in their plans, Vandervoort says.

"In London there is a large seniors' complex and they have their own fitness club, which I hear is one of the busiest in the city."

Judy Creighton welcomes letters at The Canadian Press, 36 King St. E., Toronto, Ont., M5C 2L9, but cannot answer all correspondence personally.

Thompson Sarah
Intelligence, Dec. 17, 1994