

# Weight-training class builds muscle, bone — and friendships

By Liz Kearney  
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**F**or a workout class, there were a lot of laughs and a lot of conversation going on.

Once a week for the past six weeks — and with two more weeks to go — a group of about 15 people have been meeting in a conference room at Livingston HealthCare to take a weight-training class. The members are mostly seniors.

On Friday, 10 class members gathered in a circle for a 45-minute routine that included leg raises with ankle weights, seated bent-forward flyes with hand weights, calf raises, light stretching — and a lot of laughs and conversation that ranged from celebrity gossip to cheering each other's successes.

Class member Melanie Duran attends the class along with her twin sister, Merrilee Bryan.

Bryan said she had taken the class when it was offered several years ago. She had a bone-density test, known as a DEXA scan, before and after the class, and the numbers showed real improvement after the

class, she said.

She returned to take the class again this spring because working out with a group motivates her to show up and do the work.

"It's too easy to let it slip if you're just doing it at home," she said.

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— Merrilee Bryan, class participant

The class is hosted by Livingston HealthCare and Montana State University Park County Extension. On Friday, LHC's "Food and Nutrition Services Manager" Jessica Wilcox was leading the class. MSU offered a training for instructors, which Wilcox participated in, qualifying her as an instructor.

The class is based on the popular book, "Strong Women Stay Young," a 1997 book by Miriam Nelson, a nutrition professor at Tufts University.

Wilcox said weight training, also called resistance training, provides a number of health benefits for seniors, including stronger muscles for everyday tasks, better balance, weight loss and blood sugar control.

Staying strong helps seniors remain in their own homes longer as they age, she said.

People who do weight training also report sleeping better, Wilcox said.

And a side benefit has turned out to be social engagement, Wilcox said.

Research shows that it's easy for seniors to become isolated, and a class helps them form bonds with new people. She said the class members talked about continuing together with an arthritis exercise class at the Park County Senior Center.

Wilcox also works in some light discussion about dietary choices, like focusing on lean protein sources and whole grains.

The class has proven popular, and another session will probably be offered in September, she said.

On Friday afternoon, the class was congratulating Bertha Roylance on doing calf raises without having to hold on to the back of her chair anymore, and another member said he's noticed big improvements in his balance.

"I put on my tennis shoes today standing on one foot," Dan Hartman said. "And I didn't fall over on my face," he added, laughing.