

Stretch Bands

Buying a set of weights always seems like a good idea. I guess that's why I've purchased numerous sets over the years. Instead of actually using them, I have eventually donated the weights to garage sales. Today I'm the proud owner of a complete weightlifting system in our sun room. I don't use it either but it impresses friends when they visit. Constantly changing the pins to increase/decrease the weight is more trouble than it's worth for me. OK, I admit I have an attitude when working out becomes work.

But, for \$4, I've found a solution that works – for me. The answer is as simple as a four-foot vinyl stretch band. This is one of those times that “no pain, no gain” doesn't apply. Success doesn't have to be complicated or painful. I have been able to improve my upper-body strength while watching television! Whether I'm guiding the tandem around a curve or veering down a rocky mountain bike trail, the added strength also is my safety margin.

Stretch bands come in various colors – yellow, green, red, blue and black. Yellow offers the least resistance while black offers the most resistance. I use a blue band. I told you it was simple. Color coding works for me instead of checking to see if a weight is 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 pounds etc. And if I would like a stretch band that offers the resistance of a black band, I don't need to spend \$4 more. I can get the same effect by shortening my blue band with my hand. I said it was simple.



My wife and I do a lot of bike touring. I would never take weights in our cart but a band takes up less space than a pair of socks and weighs less. There's nothing to set up, screws to tighten etc. At the motel, all I have to do is put my foot or hand on the band and I'm ready to work out for as little or as much as I want. At airports, I get questioned about all the pipe in my one suitcase (a Bike Friday is inside) but security has never worried about a blue piece of vinyl.

In addition to creating resistance to improve muscle strength, a stretch band can be used to own up to its name – help with stretching. After a century ride, the muscles in my upper back let me know they've been neglected. By putting the stretch band in front or behind me or over my head, I can pull muscles back into place. I can put the band under my feet to help deal with leg muscles. There are some standard exercises but with a stretch band, one can create any exercise one wants. OK, resist the temptation to use it as a rubber band when a cycling mate walks by.

One of the drawbacks to using weights is the user can be easily injured if one is not using proper technique or attempts to exceed one's ability to lift. Dropping weights is not a good plan – particularly on one's face, chest or foot. But if I drop a stretch band weighing several ounces, I won't even need to say, "ouch"!