

Let's Talk Cardio.....

You've decided you are ready to start on a cardiovascular exercise plan (cardio for short) but you have no idea how long, how fast or what form of exercise would be the best for you. Where do you start?

First you need to decide if you are doing this exercise for health benefits, such as to lower blood pressure, cholesterol, triglycerides, to control diabetes, or in order to help you lose body fat. This will help determine how long you will need to work out depending on your present condition.

If you are in good health and want to maintain the status quo the American Medical Association (AMA) recommends “*30 minutes of accumulative*” aerobic exercise per day, everyday. This means that a **very brisk** walk/walks totaling 30 minutes or more would be appropriate. Walking a dog can count only if the dog doesn't stop during the walk.

If you are trying to control high blood pressure, cholesterol, or diabetes, the more you exercise, the more benefits you reap. Exercising only 30 minutes a day is the minimum you need to do. Being able to increase your time by just 15 to 30 additional minutes for just two or three days a week, while still exercising 30 minutes the remaining days, will significantly reduce the number of weeks it will take to begin reaping the benefits of your hard work. The bottom line is, the more time you can spend exercising each day, the sooner you to see and feel the improvements to your health.

For weight loss the AMA recommends 60 to 90 minutes of exercise per day. Most of us living in the real world don't have time to accomplish this, so a more realistic goal might be a 60 minute workout three days per week and 30 minutes as many other days as you can. The good news is that the weight training that you do can count as cardio time also if conducted with that in mind. For the maximum calorie burn verses fat burn you should try and work out at a maximum of 80% of your maximum heart rate. Interval training will be beneficial also when trying to lose body fat.

Three of the most popular ways to find out what 80% of your heart rate is (we call this your anaerobic threshold or AT for short), are:

1. Estimate it at $180 - \text{your age} = \text{your AT}$
2. Exercise to a point where you begin to not be able to talk in smooth sentences and then take your heart rate.

3. Have your exact AT measured by a facility owning the proper equipment where you will wear a mask while exercising and the machine will measure your oxygen output. (Lifetime Fitness owns one and you do not have to be a member)

Now that you have an idea of about how hard and how long you will be working out for, here are three different workouts for you to try that will incorporate strength, speed and endurance. These three workouts would be an example of a typical week of cardio. They are done in 2-3 minute segments so you will be able to tailor the workout to the time you have.

The first workout is a strength workout. It uses an incline in order to increase your heart rate and in doing you will be working out your glutes and hamstrings. You will begin at a 2 incline for your warm up slowly increasing your speed over the next 5 minutes to a very brisk walk. Beginning at the 5 minute mark you will increase your incline to 4% and continue to increase your incline by 1% every 2 minutes until you reach 8%. If you are not a beginner you can start your incline at 6% and increase to 10%. When your total time reaches 15 minutes you will decrease your incline down to a 4% to recover for 2 minutes then repeat the process. The important thing to remember is to keep your heart rate under your 80% (your AT). You will have to adjust your speed as you increase your incline in order achieve this. Continue with this process until you reach your time limit then cool down for 5 minutes before stopping the treadmill.

The speed workout is done in intervals similar to the strength workout. You will begin your workout at an incline of 2% and it will remain there for the duration. The first 5 minutes will consist of your warm up with a slow increase in speed. You will then speed up in order to get close to your AT for 3 minutes, then slow down to around 70% for 1 minute, then speed up for 3 and so forth. Remember to cool down at the end of your workout.

The third workout can be done on the equipment of choice be it an elliptical, bicycle, etc. You will warm up for 5 minutes then slowly increase you speed, not your incline, until your are at your AT then remain close to your AT for most of the workout. Your last 5-10 minutes will be a slow cool down.

The important thing to remember is to have fun and be safe. As with any exercise program make sure you obtain medical clearance before beginning.

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