



Cardio Training Guide

Burn fat with the best cardio workout for your body
by Sharise Cunningham

Many new and even experienced exercisers want the inside scoop on the best machine or exercise to use for optimal cardiovascular benefit and weight loss. According to the pros, the answer is simple: there really is no "best" exercise. Each type has benefits and pitfalls.

Cardiovascular exercise is any continuous activity that gets your heart working and can be sustained from 15 to 60 minutes or beyond. A well-rounded cardio routine generally uses large muscle groups such as the legs, hips and glutes, but some activities like swimming and cross-country skiing engage the entire body.

The Benefits of Cardio:

- Increase metabolic rate
- Increase lung capacity
- Reduce risk of heart attack
- Improve cholesterol levels
- Reduce high blood pressure
- Reduce risk of diabetes
- Provide better sleep
- Reduce stress
- Strengthen heart for efficient blood flow
- Improve digestion
- Improve immune system function

Weight Bearing vs. Non-Weight Bearing

With weight-bearing exercises, your feet and legs support your body weight. Running, walking, jogging, and stair climbing are weight-bearing exercises. These exercises are great for strengthening bones.

Non-weight bearing exercises like bicycling, rowing and swimming support the body. Because these exercises are non-impact, they tend to be easier on the joints. As a result, they can have a lower risk of injury than weight-bearing exercises.

Debunking Cardio Myths

Let's dispense of a couple of common misconceptions. No *one* exercise will produce greater results than the others. You simply need to find the best cardio exercise for you by looking at what cardio activities you enjoy doing.

J. Hammet, personal trainer and owner of Vibefit in Atlanta says the best cardio workout also depends on your fitness goals. By getting active you can almost be assured to lose weight, but the big question is, will you lose muscle or fat? Most of us imagine losing fat when we think of "losing weight" but the fact is you can over train—such as training for a marathon—and get into the area where you begin to burn muscle.

According to Hammet, our bodies use four sources of fuel: carbs, proteins, fat and muscle. After about 40 minutes of training, your body begins to access muscle for

fuel. Again, this is not entirely a bad thing; it just depends on your goals. Most professional runners are extremely lean and if running is your sport, then you're most likely to have a similar physique. This loss of muscle is why many bodybuilders don't run, Hammet says.

The second misconception is thinking that one cardio machine or exercise will tone muscles quicker. Cardio workouts are not designed to tone muscles. For noticeable toning you need resistance and cardio workouts simply don't provide sufficient resistance to create muscle tone. They are strictly for fat and muscle loss. Don't expect full body toning from a cardio machine just because it has swinging handgrips, those are primarily to keep you balanced and in good form.

Randy Nicholson, founding partner of The Fitness FIRM Studio in Atlanta recommends women in particular would benefit from what he calls "cardioresistance" training, which combines cardiovascular exercise with strength training.

"You can use a variety of programs but we have found circuit training—moving from one station to the next with minimal rest—promotes the quickest weight loss and also improves the 'toned' look every woman wants." A circuit of four to eight stations is best, Nicholson says.

So, if the specific exercise doesn't matter, you might be left wondering what does. Frequency, duration, and intensity are the keys to getting the most out of your cardio workouts.

Recent research shows that continuous exercise at any intensity provides effective fat loss but the harder you work at *any* cardio exercise, the more calories you burn. You'll experience better fat loss working intensely for 20 minutes than you would with a low-intensity 40-minute workout. You'll also increase your aerobic capacity (VO2max), maintain lean muscle mass, and boost your metabolism during and after exercise.

Rating Cardio Machines

Common outdoor cardio activities include walking, jogging, cycling and hiking. You don't need to belong to a health club to participate in cardio activities but the variety of equipment can give you more options. Hammett says that exercising outside the home is important because you'll be motivated by social interaction.

Three popular cardio machines you'll find in most gyms are the treadmill, stationary bike, and elliptical trainer (a machine that combines the motion of a stair climber and a skier, moving your feet in an elliptical shape). Our trainers point out the following benefits and pitfalls of each.

	Benefits	Pitfalls
Treadmill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides aerobic and cardio workout • Climate controlled environment • Allows for sport-specific training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inferior flexdecks • Mechanical movement
Stationary Bike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good for those with knee, ankle or other injuries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Least effective cardio benefit
Elliptical Trainer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides aerobic and cardio workout • Good for interval training with treadmill • Safe, non impact • Uses kinetic energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not good for those with back pain, knee or other injuries

Our trainers rank the treadmill and elliptical trainer as the most effective cardio workouts followed by the stationary bike. Hammet adds that the recumbent bike is the lazy man's exercise and is used by those who need to feel like they did something at the gym but really exert very little effort. He would only recommend this exercise for the over fat.

Nicholson says, "You will burn more calories running if you do not have any ankle, knee or hip injuries. Second would be the elliptical trainer, which was designed for people with those injuries and third is the bike, which is best only during rehab or as a warm up before a weight-training workout".

Getting Maximum Benefit

- Workout three times a week, for about 20 minutes
- Workout on an empty stomach, preferably early in the morning
- Drink plenty of water before and after, and during workout if longer than 20 minutes
- Train in your target heart-rate zone
- Always include a warm-up and cool-down
- Train using variety to avoid boredom and plateaus
- Set goals and train with purpose

The Workout

Before you start, it's important to understand intensity levels. A heart monitor will help you stay within the recommended 60-90% of your target heart rate but using a ratings of perceived exertion (RPE) scale may be easier for beginners. The scale goes from 0-10 with 0 being no effort and 10 being maximum effort but fitness experts have simplified it as follows:

- Level 4: easy, warm-up level,
- Level 5: still fairly easy, low to moderate intensity
- Level 6: moderate intensity, working and breathing a little hard
- Level 7: moderate to high intensity, breathing harder, more challenging
- Level 8: high intensity, very challenging, breathing very hard, difficult to talk

- Level 9: very high intensity, busting your butt to keep up, breathing seriously hard
- Level 10: maximum intensity, feels like your heart will burst out of your chest.

The great thing about this 20-minute high intensity walk/run workout is that it can be done outdoors or in a gym on a treadmill, Stairmaster, or Cross-Trainer. It's very simple for beginners and you can adjust the interval lengths as your fitness level improves.

Minute	RPE/Intensity	Target Heart Rate
0-1	4 low (warm-up)	50%
2	5 low to moderate	60%
3	6 moderate	70%
4	7 moderate to high	75%
5	8 high	80%
6	9 really high	85%
7	6 moderate	70%
8	7 moderate to high	75%
9	8 high	80%
10	9 really high	85%
11	6 moderate	70%
12	7 moderate to high	75%
13	8 high	80%
14	9 really high	85%
15	6 moderate	70%
16	7 moderate to high	75%
17	8 high	80%
18	9 really high	85%
19	5 low to moderate	60%
20	4 low (cool-down)	50%

If you'd like to try a small group workout that's sure to avoid boredom and keep you motivated, Michael Bonetti, also of The Fitness FIRM Studio suggests the FIRM circuit class. "[The class] will not only increase cardio response, but [will help you] lose weight and tone up fast".

For optimum results with any program you should combine your cardio workout with strength training and proper nutrition. If you've been sedentary or have health problems, consult your physician before starting a workout program.