

Designing a Healthy, Safe and Effective Workout

Part 1: Cardiovascular/Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercises include running, fast walking, stair stepping, “aerobics” classes, swimming and any other exercise that will raise your heart rate and keep it raised for 30 minutes straight. Weight lifting, tennis, racquetball and other “stop and go” exercises and sports are not considered aerobic since the heart rate has time to slow down during breaks in the action.

Your heart rate is the critical factor in determining the quality of your workout. Exercising with too high or too low a heart rate will negate or severely limit the benefits of your hard work. To calculate your target heart rate zone subtract your age from 220 and multiply the answer by 0.6 to get the lowest heart rate and 0.8 to get the highest. For example a 50 year old would take $220 - 50 = 170$. $170 \times 0.6 = 102$ and $170 \times 0.8 = 136$. This person would set the intensity of the workout to keep the heart rate between 102 and 136 beats per minute.

Exercising within this zone is safe and promotes burning fat for energy. A higher heart rate promotes burning sugar for energy and may be unsafe and potentially dangerous. Training below the zone means your body is burning sugar, the health benefits are fewer and there is little benefit to the cardiovascular system.

When we exercise in the target zone we train our body to burn fat when we're not exercising. The benefits of this are tremendous, preventing heart disease, strokes and diabetes. Burning more fat means your body is leaner, your physique is more defined and your clothes fit better. You are less winded in your daily activities and sports and you have more energy all day long.

When we exercise outside the target zone we train our body to burn sugar when we're not exercising and this leads to sugar and carbohydrate (bread, pasta, cookies, crackers, sweet drinks, sugary foods and chips) cravings and the need for more frequent meals. These cravings cause more cravings and the cycle is endless until you stop it. A person training improperly might get frustrated or quit as they see little or no benefits from their hard work.

Create a cardiovascular (aerobic) fitness program for yourself that includes at least 30 minutes of target zone exercise a day, at least 3 to 5 days per week. Next time we'll talk about the strengthening part of your workout.

Yours in health,

Dr. Rick

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