



Unlocking the Mysteries of Cardio Training

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Whether you are just starting to get into shape or training for a marathon, the following questions always seem to pop up among people trying to get into cardiovascular shape... How long should I ride the stationary bike if I want to lose weight? How far should I walk to get a good cardio workout? Should I run fast for a short period of time or jog slowly for a longer period of time? These are all valid questions when you are trying to get the most out of your body.

Firstly, in order for you to truly understand how to achieve the goals you want, you should know a little bit about what "cardiovascular fitness" is. Basically your cardio fitness is the ability of your body to take and use oxygen. The more oxygen your body can use, the more efficient your oxygen uptake is, and therefore, the more cardio "fit" you are. Studies have shown that aerobic training such as running, walking briskly, or riding a bike can increase your cardio fit level by anywhere from 5% to 20%. Individuals with very low levels of initial fitness can see increases of 40%! Interestingly enough, oxygen is not the only source of energy in the body. If you do very intense exercise, your body will no longer be using oxygen, but energy stored in the body in the form of glucose. This is called anaerobic activity.

Not only does cardio exercise increase your overall fitness level, it also is the best way to use exercise as a method of losing weight. Now, about those nagging questions I mentioned earlier.

How long should I ride the stationary bike if I want to lose weight?

Firstly, the safest way to lose weight is by shedding off 1-2 pounds per week through a combination of diet and exercise. Losing more weight than that per week is unhealthy and can lead to fatigue among other things. If you are going to ride the stationary bike, jog, walk, or do whatever activity you choose, you should engage in 45-60 minutes of continuous or intermittent *moderate* activity 3-5 days per week for *cardiovascular fitness*. If you want to lose weight, you should increase that to 45-90 minutes of continuous or intermittent *moderate* activity 4-5 days per week.

I used the word *moderate* for the above general guidelines because this segues perfectly into the next set of questions. What about intensity? Did you know that you would burn the same amount of calories if you walk 3 miles or if you run those same 3 miles? Now, if you walk 3 miles at a pace of 1 mile every 15 minutes, it would take you 45 minutes to travel those 3 miles. However, if you run those same 3 miles at a pace of 1 mile every 10 minutes, you will complete the distance in 30 minutes. Therefore, intensity is a very important variable when considering your cardio routines. Higher intensity workouts will

always be shorter than your lower intensity workouts. The benefit of high intensity workouts is that you are able to gain a higher level of immediate energy efficiency in your body (remember the anaerobic activity I mentioned earlier?).

If you are not a highly fit individual, it is best to start off with moderate intensity aerobic activities such as walking. As your fitness level increases, you can start to increase your intensity to burn more calories faster. I would still encourage you, at any fitness level, to mix up your routines. If you walk 3 days per week for example, I would do one 60 minute walk on day 1. Then do a 45 minute walk (but walk at a faster pace) on day 2 and maybe do a walk/ jog combination such as walk 5 minutes, then jog 2 minutes for 30 minutes on day 3. Doing this will increase your fitness level (your oxygen efficiency) and help you lose weight.

If you are already very fit, my recommendation for getting in the best shape FAST is to include high-intensity workouts in your routine. Commit one of your cardio days to doing sprints, whether it is in the pool, on the bike, wherever. Commit another day to tempo work, such as going as fast as you can a medium distance. If you are training for a 5k, this distance may be 1.5 miles, for example. Thirdly, I would commit at least one day to your long workout. Give yourself a good 60-90 minutes of moderate activity to really increase your endurance and burn those calories!

The human body is an amazing machine. Get out there and use it!