

Balancing Act!

Burning Fat: Myths and Facts

A popular myth is that there is a specific range of heart rates in which you must exercise to burn fat. Even many cardio machines display a “fat-burning zone” on their panels, encouraging people to exercise in a specific heart rate range. Jason R. Karp, PhD, a nationally recognized speaker, writer and exercise physiologist who coaches recreational runners to Olympic hopefuls, sheds light on this issue.

Fuel Use During Exercise

You use both fat and carbohydrates for energy during exercise, with these two fuels providing that energy on a sliding scale. During exercise at a very low intensity (e.g., walking), fat accounts for most of the energy expenditure. As exercise intensity increases the percentage of fat burned decreases, while your body begins to burn a higher percentage of carbohydrates. At extremely high intensities, you will only burn calories from carbohydrates.

Since proportionally more fat is used at low exercise intensities, people often assume that low-intensity exercise is best for burning fat, an idea that has given birth to the “fat-burning zone.”

However, if you exercise at a low intensity, when you will burn a higher percentage of fat, the rate of caloric expenditure and the *total number of calories expended* are much lower than they are when exercising at a higher intensity, which burns proportionally more carbohydrates. This caloric difference is so significant that the higher intensity exercise can still burn more total fat.

The Bottom Line:

For fat and weight loss, what matters most is the difference between the number of calories you *expend* and the number of calories you *consume*. Fat and weight loss is about burning lots of calories and cutting back on the number of calories consumed. For the purpose of losing weight, it matters little whether the calories burned during exercise come from fat or carbohydrates.

Workouts for Fat Loss

To maximize your fat loss, try these workouts. For assistance in designing effective, safe workouts, consult with a certified personal trainer or fitness coach.

Go Hard

A great way to perform high-intensity exercise and decrease your body fat percentage is through interval training, which breaks up the work with periods of rest. Not only does interval training allow you to improve your fitness quickly; it is also more effective than continuous exercise for burning lots of calories during exercise and increasing your post-workout metabolic rate.

Try one or two of these workouts each week based on your own personal fitness level:

Exercise for 3-4 minutes at 85% - 90% max HR with a 1-2 minute active recovery at 65%-70% max HR. (this set would last about 5 minutes.)

Exercise 4 minutes at 85%–90% max HR with 3-minute active recovery at 65% - 70% max HR

Repeat each interval for a total of at least twenty minutes. For example, you would repeat the first option above 4 times to achieve your 20 minute goal. Each of these interval workouts should include a warm-up and a cool-down.

How to calculate max Heart Rate (HR)? Take 220 minus your age to get your maximum heart rate average. Then calculate the percentages above to determine your heart rate ranges for your interval workouts above.

© Copyright 2010 published by Fitness by Phone®

