

Movement Methods: Cardio Guide

Regular cardiovascular activity is a key component to good overall health. The CDC recommends at least 150 weekly minutes of physical activity, which should include a cardio component. And while most people know that cardiovascular activity is critical, it can still be difficult to get started.

An elevated heart rate and increased respiration (breathing) are two products of cardio training. This may be uncomfortable at first, so use these tips to set yourself up to be successful when its time to break a sweat.

- Establish a schedule. For beginners, start with 3 days of exercise each week with a day of rest in between. Schedules help keep you on track and accountable. Find days and times that work best for your needs, and stick with them.
- Find an activity that you enjoy – Perhaps the most important point to consider when taking up cardiovascular exercise. Finding an activity that you enjoy will keep you engaged. If you discover that running or walking aren't your favorites, consider some other fun cardio activities: cycling, swimming, aerobics, rowing, stair climbing, etc.
- Start with 5-10 minutes of light cardio to warm up, gradually increasing heart rate.
- Ramp up the pace and intensity until the activity is slightly more than comfortable (approx Level 5 or 6 on the Perceived Exertion Scale, or use a Heart Rate monitor) and go as long as you comfortably can. If you can't sustain the activity for long, try intervals of one minute on/one minute rest and increase as you improve.
- Conclude your workout with a five-minute cool down of light cardio and stretching.
- Each week, increase your workout time by a few minutes until you can work continuously for 30 minutes a session.
- Don't worry about distance or pace. For the first few weeks, focus on showing up for your workouts and building time.
- After 4-6 weeks, change your routine by adding another day of exercise, increasing your pace/intensity, adding a new activity and/or increasing the amount of time you exercise.

How Hard Should You Work?

There are a few ways to quantify effort, as described below. Cardio should generally be done in the moderate-effort zone, but strenuous efforts may be mixed in as well.

- Target Heart Rate Zone - By calculating your THR, you can use a heart rate monitor to track your heart rate and make sure you're staying in the most effective heart rate zone.
- Perceived Exertion - You can also monitor how you feel throughout your workout, ranking it on a scale of 1 to 10. A moderate workout should put you at about a level 5 or 6, a level that feels like exercise but isn't out of your comfort zone.
- The Talk Test - This one is simple - If you can talk easily while you are exercising, you can probably push harder. If you can talk in short sentences, you're right at a moderate pace. If you are breathless, you are training at a high effort. This is okay for intervals, but unsustainable for a complete workout and should be employed judiciously.