



## **Follow Your Heart**

Cardiovascular training is a grey area for many. Few really know the level or time they need to spend doing CV to achieve the desired results without wasting time or energy. For the keen but uncertain this can lead to over-training and slow recovery times. At the other end of the scale, the less motivated might flounder in a very low level area every session with the aim of 'burning fat' and not move any closer to their objective.

Assuming you are putting effort into sustaining a healthy lifestyle, no minutes should be lost or energy wasted on a session that isn't giving our body its best opportunity to respond. Ideally we want to optimise every minute of our CV activity.

We've all seen people doing their familiar 'fat burning' routine for the same time at the same level for weeks, months, sometimes years on end. Their routine barely changes and neither sadly, despite their loyalty to such repetitive exercise, does their appearance or fitness level! Conversely, some people train at a reasonably high aerobic level for years on end and never budge into higher or lower heart rate regions. Apart from making the individual reasonably efficient at that level, it really isn't maximising his or hers potential fitness at any level

Of course any exercise is better than none at all but we could really reap greater rewards with a little more precision and understanding of heart rates. The misunderstanding starts with the arcane heart rate guides plastered all over exercise equipment. There are a couple of things worth remembering about this - everybody is unique, we all have a maximum heart rate that is determined by genetics *and* this doesn't reduce with age...it just might feel more uncomfortable to reach whilst we are in poor condition.

The maximum heart rate needs to be individually tested. Once we know this figure we can design workouts to exactly suit ourselves. The formula ordinarily used to calculate max' training capacity is  $220 \text{ minus your age} \times 80 \%$ . This formula falls flat on its face in many ways particularly as we age. For example following that method a 50-year-old would have a heart rate limit of 136 - a brisk walk in the park for some. Following this as a guide line could either lead to de-conditioning or over-training. Maximum heart rates can vary from 150 to 220 BPM and these two figures may belong to people as fit and fast as each other. The higher heart rate doesn't mean the better athlete. The key is to find out what your max heart rate is and to work from the right numbers of beats per minute.

For optimum results the body needs to be worked through different phases and levels over time. 'Time' means months and not a sudden introduction of explosive work into a normally gentle routine. Taking the body through such phases is another way to facilitate effective fat loss.

Look at CV training in terms of zones varying from 1 to 5. 1 is comfortable, 5 is explosive and extreme and time spent in this zone needs to be well calculated to avoid adverse affects. Each one of these zones needs to be covered over a periodised cycle (months) and the minutes in each zone carefully considered for the workouts. This will offer maximum results with minimum fatigue.



So as you will be starting to appreciate - optimum results is about following your heart.

Having a successful fat burning workout has everything to do with raising the threshold. This is the area in which we feel pushed and fatigued. Reaching the threshold too soon reduces the fat burning facility. A slow warm up is important – it tells the fat cells to release fat for fuel during exercise; it also allows the body to expand the fat burning range and extend the threshold.

Our threshold changes daily and is affected by stress, fatigue, sickness and more - another good reason to gradually increase intensity so as not to misread the body's signals and heart rate. When 'Spinning' first came out the participants noticed their fat % reduce for the first time in years. This was because the cyclist could warm up from spinning the weighted flywheel without intensity and therefore didn't significantly raise the heart rate in the early minutes. Skipping this stage of the workout leaves the body ill prepared for effective fat burning or progression in training.

The crunch comes in finding out your max heart rate without having to reach it! That kind of testing requires the athlete to be at the peak of fitness and have a cheering crowd to see him through the pain barrier – not for most days or most people! Other methods are more bearable and if conducted correctly, just as accurate. Since the fitness industry hasn't quite got a hold on this research, finding a facilitator is hard. However a few guidelines below will most certainly spruce up your CV work and have your body responding well in fitness and fat loss

#### **Best things to do:**

- Establish realistically how much time can be committed to CV in your week.
- Treat the body with respect and don't skip stages or phases to 'speed up your fitness'.
- Warm up very slowly i.e. approx 20 - 30 BPM over a 10 minute period.
- The progression needs to be over months and the proportions of time / minutes in zones properly calculated.
- Avoid staying at one level for a length of time. Expand the region a little. For example if you find yourself regularly at 140bpm, play around between 130 and 145.
- Going back to base is important every few months. The level may seem extremely easy but the benefits are worthwhile.

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