

LOW INTENSITY CARDIO LEADS TO GREAT FAT LOSS?

When it comes to fat burning, many individuals are misled by the so-called “Fat Burning Zone” labels on treadmills, thinking that low-intensity aerobic exercises will help them lose more fat than if they were to do high-intensity aerobic exercises. This myth has unfortunately spawned a subculture of individuals who perform Vulcan death grips on metal hand sensors, desperately hoping to stay within their “fat burn heart rate zone” while walking slowly on the treadmill. This “zone” is far from true and is one of the most pervasive myths lingering in the fitness industry. To some extent lower intensity cardio will help to burn fat, but the concept is misleading and does not take into account the time it takes for lower intensity cardio to burn fat effectively. If you were to hike all day you would burn a considerable amount of fat; but not all of us have the luxury of hiking all day or walking on the treadmill for five hours straight.

Whenever we do aerobic exercise we are burning both fats and carbohydrates. The myth is that those who perform low intensity workouts burn a higher percentage of fats (as opposed to burning carbohydrates) than those who perform at a higher intensity. However, for marketers in the fitness world, percentage is relative and strategic. An example demonstrates this idea. Let’s compare a 140 lb woman walking briskly (moderate intensity exercise) with the same woman jogging (high intensity exercise).

Over the space of an hour, she would have burned the following:

As we can see, high intensity cardio facilitates burning the same amount of fat than training at a moderate intensity. Keep in mind that it is not the amount of fat burned that matters at the end of the day, it is the total amount of calories. As the table illustrates, the 140 lb woman who performed a high intensity jog burned more calories than when she did a low intensity walk. Thus, high intensity training correlates with greater fat loss. However, the story is not complete quite yet.

We have established that high-intensity aerobic exercise not only allows you to burn the same amount of fat calories than low intensity training, but also burn more overall calories in the long run. However, jogging at 6.0 MPH on a treadmill for four months straight is counterproductive; your body becomes more economical to burning fat as you reach this plateau. Here is another analogy: weight trainers bench pressing 100 lbs for four month straight have

reached a plateau, and at this stage they will not see any more muscle gains. For cardio-enthusiasts wanting to lose weight, jogging at 6.0 MPH for four months straight without increasing speed will no longer allow them to burn fat efficiently.

A solution to this plateau would be interval training. Interval training is defined as repetitions of high intensity work followed by periods of rest or low intensity. This training technique is often used by long-distance runners and sprinters and should be adapted to recreational exercisers at gyms. A study done in 1994 showed that those who performed High-Intensity Interval Training (30 minute duration) compared to those who performed Endurance Training (30-45 minutes) lost over three times as much fat as the latter group. Over a period of 20 weeks, the Endurance Training group lost on average 4.5 mm of body fat compared

to the Interval Training group who lost on average 13.9mm. I must issue a word of warning to those who think that interval training is the perfect solution to their fat loss problem. For beginners, start with low to moderate intensity for now and slowly work your way up to high intensity training over a period of a several months. Once you have reached a plateau, then incorporate interval training. Those who are stuck at 6.0 MPH on the treadmill should choose an interval training level slightly higher than 6.0 MPH. There are several “programs” on most cardio machines that allow you to choose interval training. Ask a weight room attendant for assistance if you have problems with these functions. Remember: train hard, but train safe.

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	Moderate Intensity (60-70% of Max Heart Rate)	High Intensity (70-80%)
Total Calories Burned	192	288
Percentage of Total Calories Burned that are Fat Calories	75%	50%
Total Fat Calories Burned	144	144