



Want to get fit fast? HIIT It

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Fitness trends, like fad diets, come and go and, often times, come around again. Still among one of the hottest trends for the second year, according to the American College of Sports Medicine's annual survey of fitness trends, is HIIT, otherwise known as high intensity interval training, which is short periods of intense exercise followed by slower recovery periods done in repetition. While the science behind HIIT is more recent, the method has actually been around for quite some time. (Sitting number one on that list is also a blast from the past that has risen to prominence due primarily to the popularity of CrossFit – bodyweight training. Think pushups and squats.) Why the emphasis on HIIT now? For one thing, it's more bang for your buck. Harder, repetitive intervals followed by recovery have been shown to improve fitness gains, strengthen cardiovascular health and burn more fat than its endurance counterparts in a shorter amount of time (particularly of note is that studies show it continues to boost metabolic rate after the workout is complete). It also doesn't require a gym or studio membership (though both things can enhance HIIT) and in as low as 20 minutes you can have a workout in which you're affecting real change within your body. Now that's an oldie, but goodie.

No Pain, No Gain

When talking about high intensity, it is typically defined in terms of a percentage of one's peak heart rate or heart rate maximum (which is roughly 220 minus your age, though this formula is different for women. See sidebar.). There are some variations on what is considered "high intensity," but it's somewhere in the neighborhood of 80 to 90 percent of heart rate max. "Eighty-five percent is a good number to remember," says Dr. Martha Gulati, director for Preventive Cardiology and Women's Cardiovascular Health, Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. However, Dr. Gulati notes, simply using heart rate can be tricky and not always an accurate measure of how hard someone is working. "For some people, the lower level of the zone is where they will be at high intensity because they have a resting heart rate that might be low and they may not even be able to push their heart rate to 90 percent of the age-predicted heart rate despite

feeling the burn.” Similarly, she says that in contrast, some may increase their heart rate with exercise but may not be having an intense workout. “Some doctors instead rely on patients’ perceptions of their exertion level using a scale of six to 20, aiming for as high as 17, to determine how hard they can go, rather than a heart rate response.”

Sean Bartram, author of “High Intensity Interval Training for Women” (DK Publishing, 2015) concurs that perceived effort is a good marker for whether or not you’re in the zone. “If someone asks you a question during class, you should not be able to answer them,” he says. “You may glare at them and in between gasps of air tell them to ‘Shut up and work harder,’ but if you can hold a conversation, you aren’t pushing to your max. [HIIT] demands your full commitment for the results it promises.”

However, if sticking with the heart rate as an indicator of intensity, strive to work in the 80 to 90 percent zone with recovery in the 50 to 65 percent zone.

Calculating Heart Rate for Women

Dr. Gulati has created a free app called “Saving Hearts,” which uses a more precise formula for predicting heart rate that she developed for women. The formula, “206 minus 88 percent of age, gives you 100 percent of your age-predicted heart rate and this formula has been validated and is better for women,” Dr. Gulati says. The app will sync to heart rate monitors so women can see what zones they’re in during workouts.

Getting in the Zone

Knowing how hard to work is half the battle but for how long and with what sort of exercise is where the beauty of HIIT really lies. “You can play with recovery and workload,” says **Franci Cohen, exercise physiologist and owner of Fuel Fitness in Brooklyn.** “There are maybe hundreds of thousands of different combinations and ways to achieve proper training.”

If that feels like the door is too wide open, rest assured there is a place to start. Some studies have shown that the shorter bursts of intensity (as in it really, really hurts), somewhere around 30-60 seconds long, followed by a minute or more of rest are most beneficial. Obviously, where one starts depends on a person’s level of fitness. While HIIT workouts can be done alone and at home if you’re already active, exercise newbies or those experiencing any health issues should see a physician before undertaking HIIT.

Anyone new to the concept of HIIT may also want to try a class at the gym until you feel comfortable tackling it on your own. For one thing, it will provide motivation. Cohen points out that studies have shown that those who exercise with a partner tend to go harder than those who don’t. Additionally, mixing up workout combinations keeps things fresh and classes provide plenty of examples. Most importantly, classes can teach proper form, technique and work to rest ratios, as high intensity can increase the possibility of injury.

As with all things, balance is essential. Cohen recommends two to three HIIT sessions a week at most. Steady-state workouts, such as running, swimming, rowing and cycling, along with lower impact exercise (yoga, Pilates, walking, etc.) and weight training, should still very much have a place within one’s repertoire. The benefits of high intensity interval training are bona fide but that

doesn't mean that more is better. In fact, what HIIT illustrates is that you can do more with less time. Those intervals may hurt but recovery is oh-so-sweet. Your body will thank you for it all.

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SIDEBAR

'Fun' HIIT workout

Courtesy of Sean Bartram, author "High Intensity Interval Training for Women" (DK Publishing, 2015)

Use the following four exercises in a set:

Sprint

Burpee

Diagonal Mountain Climbers

Squat Jump

Perform each exercise for 30 seconds (two minutes per set) with a 30 second rest for a challenge (4:1 work to rest ratio) or take a one-minute rest between sets for a slightly less intense experience (2:1 work to rest ratio). Modify it for your level of fitness and perform four sets for a 10 to 12 minute workout.

What about Tabata?

When discussing high intensity interval training, you may hear the term "Tabata workouts." Named for the Japanese physician and researcher whose work yielded the formula, Dr. Izumi Tabata, these workouts combine short, very intense intervals of 20 seconds with short rest periods of 10 seconds for eight rounds equaling a total of four minutes (and sometimes repeated four times with a one minute rest between Tabata sets for a total workout time of 20 minutes not including a necessary warm-up and cool down). This is not for the faint of heart, literally. Tabata workouts are for very active, physically fit people, so if you're not at that level, don't undertake Tabata, yet. Save it as a goal for the future. Trust us, it'll still hurt then.