

## The Case for Steady State Cardio

Over the past several years a type of cardiovascular training known as HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training) has been gaining in popularity. This is due to research which has shown that this type of training burns more calories than traditional steady state workouts. As a result, steady state training has developed a bad reputation. While it is true that HIIT training burns more calories and provides greater increases in aerobic capacity, steady state workouts still play an important role in your quest for greater fitness and/or weight loss.

### **Steady State and HIIT**

Steady state workouts involve exercising within 65-80% of your maximum heart rate. This translates to a comfortable conversational pace at the low end of that zone and comfortably hard (conversational with increased shortness of breath) at the high end of the zone.

HIIT training involves alternating between very intense bouts of exercise (typically 85-90% of maximum heart rate) followed immediately by low intensity exercise for active recovery. For example, sprinting for 60 seconds, then walking for 2 minutes. There are many variations of HIIT training but according to **The American Council on Exercise** the appropriate work to recovery ratio for HIIT is 1 minute of work to every 2 to 3 minutes of active recovery\*. Staying active during the recovery period allows the muscles to remove the metabolic waste and produce more energy for the next bout of high intensity exercise.

HIIT also serves as an effective way to increase VO<sub>2</sub> max (the maximum amount of oxygen your lungs can supply your muscles with during exercise) without having to run for long distances or periods of time.

### **Training for Weight Loss**

For exercise to play a significant role in weight loss **The American College of Sports Medicine** recommends a minimum of 4 days per week of aerobic exercise. As previously mentioned HIIT training does provide significant caloric burn with each workout. However, when trying to lose weight some individuals will only engage in HIIT training because of the greater caloric burn. Often they are under the false impression that steady state training is a waste of time.

I say this is a false impression because a limitation of HIIT is that due to the high level of intensity and the amount of time necessary to appropriately recover from the exercise session, it is generally recommended to do no more than 2 days of HIIT per week, allowing at least one full day of recovery between training sessions. Therefore, if weight loss is your goal, trying to do so only through

HITT training can slow your progress, since HIIT training more than 2 days per week on a regular basis can put you at great risk of overtraining.

This is where steady state training comes into play. Steady state training still burns calories and because it is less intense with less recovery time needed it can be done every day, if so desired. This makes it an excellent compliment to HIIT training. Not only does it burn additional calories but it also acts as active recovery, especially in the low to mid range of the aforementioned 65-80% of maximum heart rate zone.

### **Training for Fitness**

If you are training for increased fitness, HIIT training does give you the most bang for the buck. But just as only doing two workouts per week will minimize weight loss, it will also minimize fitness gains. Doing just the minimum and expecting maximum results is not logical.

The more frequently you exercise the greater your fitness gains, providing it is not at a level which promotes overtraining. Therefore, doing steady state workouts in conjunction with HIIT training will do more to promote increased fitness. Not only will you increase your VO2 max with the HIIT training, but by combining it with steady state training you will be increasing your endurance. Being able to do more with less fatigue (as you can with good endurance) not only promotes better athleticism but also a greater quality of life.

### **Lifelong Fitness**

For optimum fitness to be achieved, it is essential to make exercise a lifestyle. Steady state and HIIT training are both key components of this process. High intensity training increases aerobic capacity which makes other activities seem easier. However, doing high intensity training all the time contributes to exercise being perceived as something that HAS to be done versus something that you enjoy doing. A mix of interval and steady state workouts can make your overall program more enjoyable due to less redundancy.

Speaking personally, after doing an interval workout I look forward to going for an extended low to moderate paced run for my next workout. This allows me to actively recover from my interval sessions and, since the run feels easier, I can better appreciate how much more fit I am. It also provides me an additional opportunity to clear my mind and reduce stress.

Another lifelong fitness contributing factor is that, as a whole, exercise causes mitochondria inside the muscle to increase in number and activity. Mitochondria are tiny structures inside cells that are responsible for producing energy. When we don't exercise, the number of mitochondria in our cells actually declines. Exercising increases the number of mitochondria in the specific muscle groups that are being worked. The end result is that with more mitochondria, you are better able to produce energy and burn fat. Therefore, more frequent activity means more mitochondria activity. This ties-in with Newton's law of motion that a body in motion stays in motion.

## **Conclusion**

Your current fitness level and medical conditions play roles in what the appropriate frequency, intensity, type, and duration of each workout should be. Speaking generally however, HIIT training and steady state aerobic training both offer advantages. When appropriately combined they become a powerful force aiding you in your quest for greater fitness.

At Your Personal Best, before developing exercise prescriptions I always begin the process with a fitness assessment to determine the correct frequency, intensity, and duration of workouts for you; thereby making your program more efficient. If you would like to learn more contact me for a free consultation.

\*With increased fitness a common approach is to increase work interval time and decrease recovery time.