

THE TRUTH ABOUT CARDIO

WHEN, HOW MUCH, AND WHAT TYPE

- *by Joey Atlas*

When it comes to making improvements in the lower body, one of the most frequently asked questions is, "What should I be doing for cardiovascular exercise?" With all of the different opinions and 'methods' being touted in the marketplace - it can be confusing and difficult to figure out your own needs - especially in regards to your specific and unique goals. The following four questions break this general question down into it's four most important elements. Read on to demystify - the 'what time?', 'what type?', 'what days?' and 'how long?' of your cardiovascular fitness prescription.

1. What is the best time of day to do my cardiovascular exercise?

When it most conveniently fits into your schedule. You will find many differing studies, articles and opinions on this subject. Some may even show or illustrate a quantitative benefit related to performing cardiovascular exercise at a specific time of day.

The bottom line is this – for arguments sake, let's assume the supposed best time of day to exercise is first thing in the morning. But you only find yourself working out one day of every week. Well, that time of day is obviously not the best time of day for you to be exercising.

The best time of day for you to do your cardiovascular exercise is a time that you actually can and will do it. 5am, 1pm, 10pm – it doesn't matter, depending on the individual; these can all be 'the best times to do cardio'.

Sometimes, you can even combine your cardio/resistance exercise in the same session – you may experience this on certain levels of the Leg, Butt, Hip and Thigh Makeover - the nature of the program doesn't allow for 'rest between sets' like typical 'gym workouts' do.

So, with the constant movement - mostly focused on the lower body - there is definite cardio effect. If it feels like a 'cardio session', makes you sweat like a 'cardio session' and makes you breathe like a 'cardio session' - then it should be counted as a cardio session, because it is.

2. Should I do my cardio workouts on the same days as my resistance/strength/weight training days or on the alternate days?

Yes and yes. You can do both. Ultimately, your schedule and lifestyle will dictate what works best for you. Both ways work well. As many of my clients know, the workouts I produce and advocate are those which provide resistance and cardio at the same time.

As a matter of fact, some of the best types of workouts combine cardio and resistance exercise right in the same training session. This is especially helpful for the 'time challenged' individual who needs the efficiency of a fusion type workout.

Don't get me wrong - I'm not preaching that you should quit any mode of 'traditional' cardio exercise - such as going out for a relaxing, 2 or 3 mile jog - or something along those lines. I love to run outdoors, 3 - 6 times per week - I consider this my 'therapy'. Some days though, I like to jump on my bike and do a one hour ride. (...in other words, your fitness program should be flexible and

fun.)

And here is another angle. Let's say you want to do 2 miles of power-walking or 35 minutes of jumping rope. There is absolutely nothing wrong with breaking this up if you can't do it all at the same time. For example, you can do a one mile power walk in the morning and the other mile at lunch or in the evening. This goes for any type of cardiovascular exercise, from swimming to stationary biking and everything in between.

3. What is the best type of cardiovascular exercise to do?

Running on a treadmill with an incline, the stair-stepper on low speed, the stationary bike on high speed, jumping rope for 20 minutes – this list can go on forever. And these are all very good variations of cardiovascular exercise. But again, it all comes down to your needs, preferences, abilities and schedule. Do what feels best to you. Choose the method that you are most likely to adhere to. As I mentioned previously – a fun, time saving, benefit delivering concept is the combination of cardio and resistance training in the same workout. There are many ways to do this and these types of workouts are not 'the only way' to go, but they do provide a unique, results oriented, variation to include in your overall plan for lifelong fitness success.

Let's back up here and put this into a simpler frame of reference. I'm going to assume that you are either a pure beginner, a 'try this again' beginner or a personal trainer who works with these types of clients. With that in mind, an incredibly successful, wildly effective, cardiovascular workout might a simple, fifteen minute walk. You must realize this is not a lesson in absolutes but rather a solution based on relativity.

In other words, the parameters of your cardiovascular exercise routine should be based on your relative level of fitness and ability - and not measured against the broad spectrum of machines, intensities or methods.

Going up and down a flight of stairs six times may be a great workout for you at this point, whereas for someone else, it may not even budge their heart rate. But I remind you - you are not them and they are not you. I think you are getting this now.

A word on 'interval training'... "It's a great cardio option." There are several 'definitions' or variations of this concept. This one pertains to combining several cardio methods instead of focusing on just one. Here's an easy example:

- 3 minutes on the treadmill
- 3 minutes on a step machine
- 3 minutes on the elliptical machine
- repeat 3 times for a 27 minute cardio exercise session

An example without machines:

- 4 minutes going up and down a flight of stairs (at YOUR pace) - or stepping up and down on a step box or pantry step
- 3 minutes of jumping joes (a gentler, more fun, version of jumping jacks)
- 2 minutes of power walking or jogging outside or inside the house when its too cold for you.

Again there are many ways to define interval cardio workouts - so feel free to customize your own - with the main goal of raising the heart rate and making your efforts more enjoyable and fun. This

will mean different things to different people.

4. How long should each cardio session be?

Two factors determine this answer:

- 1 - How much weight do you want to lose or gain [or maybe you are ok with your weight - but want to tone, firm and shape]?
- 2 - How much time do you have?

Generally speaking, if you are just in need of cardio-respiratory benefits and overall toning, 20 – 30 minutes EVERY DAY is ideal. In other words, if you are seeking weight MAINTENANCE or weight gain - you want to keep your cardio time on the low side - as you are not trying - or needing to burn extra calories as fuel to prevent from being stored as fat.

If weight loss is your priority, 35 – 45 minutes EVERY DAY is ideal.

Now, when I say every day is ideal, I do not mean it is mandatory. In the real world, things come up, situations arise, schedules do not allow, etc. etc. – What I am getting at here is this: Plan on doing something everyday, if you do it great. If something comes up that prevents you from a couple of workouts – no problem, you still got 4 or 5 in – and if your nutrition intake is where it needs to be, then you've had a perfect week. Look ahead and keep it going.

Regarding duration: the previously mentioned time ranges are general goals, they may differ for you slightly, if any. But here is what is most important – If you have a mental goal of doing 40 minutes of cardio exercise on any given day, but your schedule will only allow for 20 minutes, don't throw in the towel thinking the 20 minutes isn't going to do anything for you. IT WILL!

20 minutes is a million times better ZERO minutes – you will get something out of it. Even if you have only 10 minutes to spare – DO IT!! But just don't let this become a regular habit, these short workouts will work for you when you need them to, but not every day.

You know what to do - now get going. If some of this is still unclear - it will make more sense as you make progress in your personal fitness and experience some of the things that are outlined above.

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