



Why Walking and Aerobics Won't Get You as Healthy as You Think

By Dr. Mercola, Mercola.com
June 15, 2010

Researchers compared aerobic fitness training to a pedometer-based walking program, measuring the fitness and health outcomes of each.

The six-month study found that those in the aerobics program showed significantly greater reductions in systolic blood pressure, peak oxygen intake, and ventilatory threshold, the point at which respiration begins to become increasingly difficult during progressive exercise.

Science Daily reports:

"All participants saw benefits: walking and fitness training groups saw a significant reduction in body mass, waist circumference and waist-to-hip ratio after the six months as well as resting heart rate."

Dr. Mercola's comments:

Walking can be a great *part* of your fitness routine, especially if you do so briskly and on a path that involves hills. It's also an ideal exercise if you're very out of shape, just starting an exercise program or obese, as it's low impact and suitable for all fitness levels.

Walking Alone Won't Cut It for Most

The problem with using walking as your sole form of aerobic activity, however, is that for most people it simply is just not intense enough to induce a training response. In most cases, even if you're out of shape to begin with your body will quickly adapt to your walking routine and will require a greater challenge to reap the most benefits.

If you are seriously out of shape, very overweight, or recovering from some type of illness then it certainly makes a load of sense to use walking. However, you must have intervals of 30 seconds or so in which you are walking really fast. The goal is to get you out of breath with a higher level of intensity.

As this latest study showed, while both the walking group and the aerobics group experienced benefits, those who did aerobics for six months had greater reductions in blood pressure and peak oxygen intake and experienced greater health benefits overall.

So if you're going to devote the time to an exercise program, and I strongly hope that you do, you may as well get the most bang for your buck, so to speak, and choose a range of activities that will give you the greatest benefits.

Why Walking and Many Other Forms of Exercise are Not Effective ...

It's not only walking that ends up selling many well-intentioned exercisers short, especially if you're over the age of 30.

Typically, most exercise works just fine for people under 30, but after that your growth hormone dramatically starts to drop. You can actually increase your growth hormone naturally through specific types of exercise, but nearly ALL common types of exercise done in the United States by those over 30 do not generate growth hormone naturally.

Regular cardio, aerobics and even most all strength training do NOT increase growth hormone because they are not exercising the super fast muscle fibers.

The only way to do this is by using anaerobic or sprint cardio type of exercises.

How to Get a Phenomenal Workout in Only 20 Minutes

Anaerobic exercises are typically [interval or sprint type workouts](#), but they don't have to be done by running. You can do them on many pieces of aerobic equipment, such as a recumbent bike, or if you have not been exercising at all, walking.

There is no magical pace or speed that triggers your body to make growth hormone. It is all personally relative and dependent on your fitness level. That is why some can achieve the benefits by alternating walking with faster walking. However, as you become more fit, it will become necessary to increase the exercise to the same type of exertion or until "out of breath" response is achieved as when you were less fit.

How to do Sprint Cardio

The principle is simple. You warm up for two to three minutes then increase the intensity so you are out of breath after doing the exercise for 30 seconds. Ideally you would like to push yourself to failure. This means that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for you to continue the exercise for another 10 seconds as you just don't have that much oxygen left to contract your muscles.

One of the best pieces of equipment to do this on is a recumbent bike. You can set the program to "Manual" so the timer counts up. It is much easier to switch between high-

intensity exercise and your 90-second recovery periods when the timer is counting up and not down.

Most bike programs count down as you enter a time you want to cycle and then it counts down. Use the manual section to help you know when to switch. I use a bike from [Vision Fitness](#).

You warm up by relaxed pedaling for three minutes and then increase the intensity and pedal as hard and fast as you can for 30 seconds . You simply have to push it very hard, to your maximum level of exertion.

If you are able to pedal at the high intensity for another 5 or 10 seconds than you did not pedal hard or fast enough, and you need to increase the intensity and/or speed.

After your 30-second workout, you pedal at a comfortable, relaxed pace for 90 seconds to recover, then you repeat this 7 times for a total of 8 cycles. If you are doing it correctly you will be sweating profusely, and it just might be one of the best workouts of your life.

The beauty of this approach is that it only requires you to exercise intensely for FOUR minutes and takes only *20 minutes* of your time. If you do it properly I can assure you that it will improve your health far more than HOURS of regular cardio.

Plus, for the two hours after your workout you will radically increase your level of growth hormone, as long as you avoid sugar.

I have been an exercise fanatic for the last 42 years, but I only recently became aware of this radical new information. It really can change your life.

I personally stopped all my regular cardio earlier this year and my body fat went down by 5% and I lost 10 pounds of fat.

The master educator who taught me this was Phil Campbell and his term for it is Sprint 8. You can get more information on this phenomenal form of exercise in his book titled [Ready Set Go](#).

I plan on introducing more detailed articles on this topic in the future, so stay tuned for more insights.

How to Round Out Your Exercise Routine

Interval training is great, but even that is not enough to keep you optimally fit. Your body will quickly adapt to a monotonous exercise program. So just when you feel you've mastered your kickboxing class and can get through it by barely breaking a sweat, it's a sign you need to work a little harder and give your body a new challenge.

So when you're planning your exercise routine, make sure it [incorporates the following types of exercise](#):

1. **Aerobic:** Jogging, using an elliptical machine, and walking fast are all examples of aerobic exercise. As you get your heart pumping, the amount of oxygen in your blood improves, and endorphins, which act as natural painkillers, increase. Meanwhile, aerobic exercise activates your immune system, helps your heart pump blood more efficiently, and increases your stamina over time.
2. **Interval (Anaerobic) Training:** Again, this is when you alternate short bursts of high-intensity exercise with gentle recovery periods.
3. **Strength Training:** Rounding out your exercise program with a 1-set strength training routine will ensure that you're really optimizing the possible health benefits of a regular exercise program.

You need enough repetitions to exhaust your muscles. The weight should be heavy enough that this can be done in fewer than 12 repetitions, yet light enough to do a minimum of four repetitions. It is also important NOT to exercise the same muscle groups every day. They need at least two days of rest to recover, repair and rebuild.

4. **Core Exercises:** Your body has 29 core muscles located mostly in your back, abdomen and pelvis. This group of muscles provides the foundation for movement throughout your entire body, and strengthening them can help protect and support your back, make your spine and body less prone to injury and help you gain greater balance and stability.
5. **Stretching:** My favorite type of stretching is active isolated stretches developed by Aaron Mattes. With Active Isolated Stretching, you hold each stretch for only two seconds, which works with your body's natural physiological makeup to improve circulation and increase the elasticity of joints. This technique also allows your body to repair itself and prepare for daily activity.

Exercise programs like Pilates and yoga are also great for strengthening your core muscles, as are specific exercises you can learn from a personal trainer.

What Will You Gain from Exercise?

Many people think of exercise as a tool for weight loss, but it is so much more than that.

For starters, it is one of the most powerful tools available to drop your insulin levels, and elevated insulin levels are one of the primary drivers for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, weight gain and many other chronic conditions.

It is my belief that properly performed exercise is far more powerful for controlling these symptoms than any drug yet developed. Exercise can also:

- Reduce your cancer risk

- Slow the aging process in your body
- Boost your immune system

No matter your age, [exercise](#) can provide enormous benefits for your health, but if you happen to be over 40 it's especially important to either start or step up your exercise program. This is the time of life when your physical strength, stamina, balance and flexibility start to decline and exercise becomes indispensable.

If possible, I would strongly encourage you to consult with an exercise professional to help you individualize your routine. There are many outstanding trainers out there and there hasn't been one trainer I have worked with who hasn't been able to teach me some great new exercise tips.

And if you're looking for some motivation, remember that exercise is far less expensive than virtually any other medical intervention, and it will radically reduce your risk of most every disease you can come down with.

If you've been sedentary for any length of time or you're out of shape for some other reason, it is vitally important to get started with an exercise program -- but start small. One of the main reasons people don't stick with a workout program is because they go too hard, too fast and wind up with an injury, illness or simple exhaustion.

By starting out at the appropriate intensity and gradually increasing your pace and duration as your body allows, you'll be able to reach your fitness and health goals safely.