



The Best Cardio Workout is Custom Built

Cardio is one of the most misunderstood concepts in fitness.

What is the best cardio workout to perform for fat loss? Are some types of cardio better than others? Do you even need to do cardio at all? There is no straight answer to any of these questions. It all depends on your situation and what your fat loss goals are. For an active individual who is already in great shape, but wants to drop his body fat from 10% to 6%, I would recommend a different cardio routine than I would for a 400 pound man who hasn't exercised in 20 years. Ultimately, you will need to build the best cardio workout for you. But first, you need to understand the different types of cardio. In this post, I will focus on three types of cardio.



Low-Intensity Steady State (LISS)

Examples:

Walking (this is the best example), low speed on a stationary bike.

Pros:

Walking is not only good for your heart, but also reduces inflammation. It is a great way to get started exercising if you are a beginner. It is low-impact, so it doesn't take a lot out of your muscles. As a result, you can do this every day and not get burned out. In fact, I recommend walking for 2-5 hours per week. I prefer to walk outside and get fresh air and sun, but if you are a gym rat, you can also walk on the treadmill.

LISS cardio is excellent at burning off fatty acids once they have been released from your fat cells into your bloodstream. Therefore, the most optimal times to perform LISS for fat loss are immediately after a high-intensity workout or in a fasted state (since both of these result in fatty acids being released into the bloodstream).

Cons:

If LISS is the only form of cardio you are doing, this is inefficient when it comes to losing fat. If you keep it up, it will work eventually, but it will take a very long time to achieve significant results.

Myths:

When it comes to exercise, walking is useless and a waste of time.

This is not true at all. Walking is the most underrated form of cardio in my opinion. Many people dismiss it because they don't think it is "real exercise" but it burns calories just like any other type of exercise and it is easy and enjoyable. I say walk as much as possible. Walk to the store. Walk to work. Walk around your neighborhood.

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Walk the dog. Walk on the beach. Sleepwalk. Walking is possibly the only type of exercise you can't overdo.



Medium-Intensity Steady State (MISS)

Examples:

Jogging at a medium pace, going medium speed on a stationary bike.

Pros:

MISS burns a lot of calories during the actual workout. If you can work up to running long enough distances, it's not difficult to burn 1,000 calories in a single workout. MISS also helps build your endurance which is good if you play sports.

Cons:

Too much jogging can result in inflammation. It can also weaken the immune system. This type of training when performed consistently (think marathon runners) will actually break down muscle, which is never good. I actually try to avoid this type of cardio except for a couple of months during the year when I'm training for an annual 15k race. For fat loss, I prefer to mix in high-intensity interval training with lots of walking.

Myths:

If you go jogging a few times a week, you can eat whatever you want and not gain weight.

This theory is complete garbage. Cardio is only effective for fat loss when combined with a good diet. Say you go to the gym and jog on the treadmill for half an hour. You may burn about 300 calories. Well done. Now you feel like you can "reward yourself" for doing such a good job, so you eat a couple of Twinkies. Guess what? You just ate back your entire workout in calories.

High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT)

Examples:

Alternating wind sprints and walking, sports that incorporate short bursts of intense activity with periods of rest (soccer, ultimate Frisbee).

Pros:

HIIT is the most efficient form of cardio for fat loss. You may not burn as many calories during the actual workout as you would during a longer MISS session, but HIIT produces an "afterburn" effect known as excess post-exercise oxygen consumption (EPOC) which burns additional calories in the hours following a workout. While it's true that all forms of cardio produce some EPOC, the effect is heightened with an intense workout such as HIIT.



Cons:

This is not a good starting point for beginners. If you are just starting a cardio routine or getting back into one, do LISS and MISS first and then work your way up to HIIT. If you do too much HIIT, you will burnout. I recommend doing no more than three HIIT sessions per week, even for well-conditioned individuals.

Myths:

HIIT will break down muscle.

Actually, the opposite is true. Explosive movements associated with sprinting work the leg muscles and core. This adds muscle tone and definition (think Olympic sprinters). Further, HIIT produces an HGH release which helps preserve muscle mass during the workout while burning fat.

My current cardio routine:

- 3 minute warm up jog, 10 wind sprints followed by 20 minute walk once per week
- 1-2 hours of soccer twice per week
- 45 minute walk three times per week (usually on off days or after lifting weights)

This may seem like a lot of cardio, but I am at the point where I am already quite lean and trying to achieve an extra-sharp level of definition. For my objective, a lot of high-intensity cardio is critical (along with diet and a good weight training routine of course). As I mentioned previously, you should customize your cardio routine to your own goals and level of fitness.

One last tip...whatever form of cardio you choose to do, make sure it's something you enjoy. There is absolutely no reason to make yourself miserable when there are so many different ways to get lean. If you hate running but enjoy walking, then walk. If you like kickboxing, then do that. This way, you will be much more likely to stick to your cardio workout and achieve long-term results.