

It's that time of the year again - along with all of the New Years resolutions that go with it. Many people will be making decisions to eat better, to give up smoking, to exercise, or to address what ever the perceived excess or shortfall is in their lives. The first thing I would say here is; if you are really serious, make it a life style change not just a New Year's resolution. It may sound like a subtle difference, but a New Year's resolution gives the subconscious mind the message of "denying myself, short lived and temporary" while the other sends the message " I am choosing to do this for my health and well being, for life". The way you engage your subconscious is one of the biggest determinants in whether you will succeed or fail.

For a large number of you, an increase in exercise will be motivated by the desire to lose weight or un-do the excesses of the Christmas break. This therefore seemed a good time to write on this subject with this goal in mind.

There are two main categories of exercise - cardio and resistance. Cardio refers to any exercise type that increases the heart rate and keeps it elevated for an extended period of time. It builds heart and lung fitness, increases circulation and is often the form of exercise that is focused on for weight loss. It tends to burn fat and build stamina rather than strength. Jogging, running, skipping, lap swimming, aerobics and moderate to fast cycling are all examples of good cardio exercise. Resistance exercise refers to exercise which builds strength specifically, and in doing so increases the amount of muscle on the body. Examples include weight lifting, Pilates and calisthenics. This type of exercise is excellent for correcting imbalances in the musculature; areas where some muscles may be weak causing other muscles to overcompensate. Overcompensating or weak muscles can lead to neck, shoulder and back problems, prolapsed organs and general tension among other problems. In addition to its corrective benefits, it increases your metabolism AND makes it harder for you to add body fat because the added muscle lifts your metabolic rate. One form of exercise is not better than the other - a mix of both forms is best.

There are many misconceptions when it comes to exercise in general. A lot of people are looking for the "short cut", that secret tip which will allow them to get results fast with minimal effort. The truth is there isn't one, but there are ways to work smarter. So, let's tackle how to use cardio more effectively for weight loss.

Any gym will have stationary bikes, treadmills, steppers, and elliptical walkers. In a 2003 study, British scientists found that the most efficient machine was the treadmill. Using it burned up to 45% more fat than the stationary bike when used at a similar intensity. The most efficient free-style cardio is skipping followed by running.

To alleviate boredom, it is often a good idea to vary the exercise type during the exercise session. For example, you could do 1 minute skipping, 5 minutes treadmill, 1 minute skipping, 5 minutes treadmill, 1 minute skipping, 10 minutes on the bike and finish with 10 minutes of treadmill. Another way is to alternate 4-5 minutes of fast walking on the treadmill with 1-2 minutes of running for a total of 25-30 minutes. Numerous studies show that this latter way of working (also called high-intensity interval training or HIIT) leads to greater fat loss than steady-state cardio done for the same length of time at a moderate intensity.

The assumption has always been that cardio is best performed in a chunk of 20-40 minutes. Scientists from the University of Missouri found that when subjects performed cardio as either a single 30 minute treadmill run at 80% of their maximum hear rate or as three 10-minute bouts of running at the same intensity separated by 20-minute rest

periods, there was no difference in the amount of calories expended or the fat burned. The subjects however, found the 3 bouts easier to achieve than the continuous run.

The time of day that you choose to do cardio can make a difference. If you do cardio in the morning before eating you will run through the stored energy reserves (glycogen) in your muscles fairly quickly. This will force your body to tap into the fat stores. For the same reason, you will get a better result doing cardio AFTER using weights rather than before hand. When you lift weights first and do cardio last you are also able to benefit from the fact that the weight lifting has increased the growth hormone levels in your body which boosts not only muscle growth, but fat burning as well.

If you eat 30-60 minutes before exercising, eat light and limit the carbohydrates. Eating a lot of food (especially of the carbohydrate variety) before you exercise will inhibit the breakdown of body fat to some degree. This is because your body will opt to burn the fuel you have just supplied rather than stored body fat. The most important time to eat a good balance of carbohydrates and protein is after the work out. You will need the carbohydrates to replenish your glycogen stores and the protein to enable your muscles to recover from the exercise effectively. Consistent failure to do this will result in poor muscle repair and glycogen depletion, which ultimately results in a loss of strength and stamina.

Heart rate monitors can be very helpful. By keeping your heart rate at an average of 135-145 beats per minute you will ensure that you are in the fat-burning "zone". Anything less than this will be markedly less effective and too high a heart rate can cause a great deal of physical stress. This is a rate at which most people achieve weight loss but don't exhaust themselves in the process. Going harder is not always better because it tends to cause a greater release of the hormone cortisol, which can counteract fat burning and muscle growth or repair.

Heart rate monitors are excellent for those who are starting out as well as for those who want to ensure the efficacy of what they are doing. Using one will make sure you are exercising within safe limits while you gain your fitness back. Most sports stores have them available and they are not generally expensive.

When your fitness has improved and you are finding it more of a challenge to keep your heart rate in the fat-burning zone, try adding weights into the equation. I have found that carrying hand weights while on the treadmill lifts the heart rate and eliminates the need to go faster. It is even more effective if I use the weights to do bicep curls and shoulder exercises while walking. It also makes the exercise feel more interesting.

One of the most over looked facts regarding using cardio for weight loss is the fact that you actually need to do it! Once or twice a week is not going to cut the mustard. However, 4-5 times per week will get you somewhere, and remember the power of your head space. If you tell yourself you'd rather be doing something else, the chances are that you will find yourself doing exactly that! Next month I will cover a few more useful tweaks for cardio, and then will start on resistance exercise.

**If you have any queries or would like to address health issues of your own please go to our website [www.selfhealclinic.co.nz](http://www.selfhealclinic.co.nz), or phone us on 06 3048177. The shop is open Tues, Thurs, Fri 9.30am - 4pm and Sat 10.30am - 4pm.**