

Cardio and Weight Training

by Dr. Cathy Wendland-Colby

What exactly is Cardio?

Cardiovascular exercise is any continuous form of exercise that causes an increase in your respiration, or breathing rate. *Cardio*, meaning heart; *vascular* meaning vessels. Cardiovascular exercise, therefore, is exercise that strengthens the heart and blood vessels or the cardiovascular system. Cardio is a common term used to describe aerobic exercise; *aerobic* meaning with oxygen. Good examples of cardio are such workouts as walking, running, biking, hiking, aerobics classes, and swimming; exercise where you are working your major muscle groups continuously.

During aerobic exercise, your muscles are burning energy in the form of stored sugars, or glucose. In order to burn this energy, you need plenty of oxygen, so you begin to breathe heavy. (You also need water to burn this energy, but we'll get to that.) After a few minutes, your body begins to adapt and your breathing becomes a little easier, though still heavier than normal. Ideally, you should get at least 30 – 40 minutes of aerobics exercise 3 – 5 days per week, for good heart health. This can be performed in one session, or broken up throughout the day.

Tell me about weight training.

Weight training is also known as resistance training. You are using some form of resistance – exercise bands, your own body weight, hand-held (free) weights or weight machines. Many weight training exercises can be performed with minimal equipment, like pushups, or perhaps with two or three sets of dumbbells. Some good examples of weight training include biceps curls, shoulder presses, leg curls, squats and lunges. Weight training is often referred to as *anaerobic* exercise, meaning without oxygen, because many people do not need to breathe heavy during this form of exercise.

If you have access to a gym, you can have a trainer show you how to use the equipment, or you can take any one of the various weight training classes. If you are exercising at home, you can purchase some dumbbells in a variety of weights to suit your needs. Just be sure that you always lift the weight slowly and smoothly with no jerky motions, use proper form and watch your posture.

What are the benefits?

Cardio will not only strengthen your heart, lungs and blood vessels, but it will also burn a large amount of calories while you are exercising, thereby temporarily raising your metabolism. Your metabolism will return back to normal within approximately four to twelve hours after finishing your cardio workout, depending on the intensity of your workout and your overall fitness level. Because you will tend to sweat while doing cardio, you will be flushing out many of the toxins in your system along with your sweat. Replenishing those lost fluids with water is essential; water is also crucial for your muscles to be able to burn calories and produce the energy to keep you going. Because the typical aerobic workout involves moving the large muscle groups of your body, it can help increase the range of motion of your joints, keeping you feeling loose and flexible.

Weight training primarily is designed to strengthen your muscles, but it also helps to strengthen your bones and joints. The resistance of the weights on your muscles requires your connective tissue (tendons and ligaments) to respond by becoming stronger as well, causing your joints and bones to become stronger and more stable. Although weight training does not typically speed up your respiration rate as much as cardio, it does still require you to burn calories.

Like aerobic exercise, lifting weights will help you burn more calories while exercising and for several hours afterwards. But here's the best news of all: the new muscle that you have developed from weight training is very hungry and in need of constant energy to survive. This means that your body will continue to burn more calories for as long as you have more muscle to feed. The result is a permanent increase in your metabolism.

Should I do both types of exercise?

There seems to be some confusion about the importance and timing of cardio versus weight training. All too often, I hear people say that they are just going to do aerobic workouts until they lose a few pounds, then they will start lifting weights. Most often they say they are afraid that they will bulk up, but for most people, that usually will not happen. Cardio and weight training both have many benefits; you will experience far better results by combining the two types of exercise, rather than relying on just one form of exercise to get you in shape. And don't worry about "bulking up". If it were that easy, we would have a lot more Arnold Schwarzenegger's running around!

Ideally, everyone should include a combination of cardio and weight training into their exercise routine. Your personal goals will determine what percentage of your workout is devoted to each type of exercise. As an example, someone who has not been exercising regularly, has gained some weight and would now like to lose that weight should incorporate a fairly equal mix of cardio and weights. A good starting goal would be to strive for 20 – 30 minutes of cardio combined with 20 -30 minutes of weight training, plus stretching, 3-4 days per week. Build up from there for added benefits by simply increasing the intensity and resistance *or* increasing the time you spend exercising.

Be sure that every workout follows this basic plan:

Warm up for a minimum of 4 – 6 minutes. Stretch all major muscle groups only after your muscles have been warmed up. Exercise at your desired intensity and duration based on your personal goals. Stretch again toward the end of your session while your muscles are still warm and flexible. Cool down for about 4 – 6 minutes to reduce acid buildup and help prevent injuries that could limit your future workouts.

Most Important Tip

During all exercise, be aware of your posture. Be sure to keep your head up, your shoulders level, your belly pulled in tight and your hips tucked under slightly.

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