

How to Get the Maximum Benefit from Exercise

By Dr. Ramona Warren

January is here and gyms are gearing up to handle the predictable influx of new members anxious to turn over a new leaf for the New Year and lose the weight they managed to gain over the holidays. Unfortunately, while January is traditionally busy, most gym owners will tell you that these good intentions are often short-lived, with gym traffic typically quieting down again by February.

Why is it that most people don't follow through on their resolution to exercise? One of the most common reasons is "not enough time." As former marathon runner, I once believed, in order to be healthy, I needed to spend a lot of time out on the roads running and in the gym at least three days a week doing weight machines. Long workout sessions can often be difficult to fit into already busy lives and often fall off the calendar at the expense of other more pressing responsibilities. Fortunately, in recent years, I have come to find that I can get a very good workout in just 30 minutes with a different kind of routine that yields great results: Interval Training.

Recently, there have been multiple studies showing the benefits of Interval Training, also referred to as "Burst Training." With Interval Training, you exercise in short intense bursts of 30 to 60 seconds, followed by an active recovery period of one to two minutes, where you continue to exercise at a lower intensity. These types of workouts are typically completed in 20 to 30 minutes.

An October 2008 study done by the University of Virginia found that Interval Training was more likely to significantly improve body composition, meaning it builds more muscle and decreases fat. The study tracked 27 middle-aged obese women who had metabolic syndrome, which is a condition that encompasses a group of risk factors including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, high triglycerides and high blood sugar. The women were divided into three groups. The first group did not alter its activity level. The second group performed low-intensity exercise (walking) 5 days a week. The third group did low-intensity exercise twice a week (walking) and high-intensity exercise (walk-running intervals) three times a week. All of the study participants maintained their same eating habits. The findings showed those who did the high-intensity intervals lost the most fat over a 16-week period. The results of this study help explain why people who use cardio machines and keep the same pace for 30 minutes or an hour never seem to lose weight. They look the same month after month, and even year after year.

Some of the benefits of Interval Training include:

- Weight loss
- Increased muscle mass
- Increased fat loss
- Increased cardiovascular endurance
- Improved blood pressure
- Burns fat more efficiently and for up to 24 hours after working out
- Increased energy
- Improved sleep

It's simple to get started with Burst Training. All you need is a good pair of tennis shoes and comfortable clothes. You don't even have to leave your house. (As always, be sure to consult your doctor before

starting any exercise program.) Choose an activity such as walking, climbing stairs, biking, running, swimming, rowing, jumping rope, using the stair climber or elliptical machine. Warm up for a few minutes, and then increase the intensity for 30 to 60 seconds. (If you can go longer than 60 seconds, you aren't pushing yourself hard enough). After your "burst," take twice as much time to recover by doing a lower intensity version of the same exercise. For example, if you do a 30-second burst, then you would have a one-minute active recovery period. Do four to eight high-intensity intervals with active rests, and you will have completed an incredibly rewarding exercise session in less than a half hour. Do this at least three to four times a week, and you will begin to see and feel the difference in your body and overall health.