

Personal Training by Robert J. Bovee

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Successful Weight Control: Which Exercise is Best?

Exercise is an essential part of any weight control program. Exercise helps you shed pounds, keep them off and look and feel better. But what kind of exercise is best?

There is no “best way” to burn fat. Low-intensity exercise is often appropriate for people with low fitness levels, or those who are overweight. You are more likely to enjoy low-intensity activities and less likely to get injured. There is, however, no reason to limit yourself to low-intensity exercise if you are in fairly good shape and like to work out more vigorously.

The notion that low-intensity exercise burns more fat than high-intensity exercise arises from the observation that the proportion of exercise calories supplied by fat is related to exercise intensity. What do we mean by this? Your body gets energy to exercise from two main sources: fat and glycogen, a form of starch (carbohydrate) stored in the muscles and liver. During high-intensity exercise, your body prefers to use glycogen because it is more efficient than using fat. At moderate intensity, your body uses some of each. And at very low intensity, your body relies primarily on fat for fuel.

Does this mean that you burn more fat at a low exercise intensity? Not necessarily because you are also burning fewer total calories per minute. You will probably burn more fat in an hour-long moderately-intense aerobics class than by taking a leisurely stroll for an hour. The proportion of calories coming from fat will be greater for the stroll, but since you burn more calories exercising at a moderate intensity, the total fat utilization will be similar or even higher. And you will burn more calories, which means you can eat more without gaining weight.

Whatever kind of exercise you will do on a regular basis is the best for burning fat. Scientists have yet to discover the “ideal” exercise program to maximize fat loss. The more calories you burn the better, as long as you do not overdo it. If you prefer low-intensity activities, that is fine, but you need to not limit yourself to low-intensity exercise if you are in decent shape and enjoy working harder. The important thing is to exercise regularly, at least five days a week, if possible. You may wish to vary your activities to prevent injury, perhaps alternating swimming with aerobics, or walking with weight training. Do not make your program so complicated that you get frustrated. If walking two miles every day works for you, then go for it and enjoy.

An exercise program should be fun, or at least as painless as possible. Think about all of the things that have kept you from exercising in the past, and eliminate all possible barriers. Consider cost, convenience and personal preferences. Do you like to exercise alone? With a friend? In a class? Do you have any orthopedic limitations, like back pain or foot problems, that limit movement? Take into account your health concerns and fitness goals. What works best for your schedule? A fitness professional can help you design a program that will work best for you.

Many people include some form of strength training, such as weight training, because of its many health benefits, and because it is the most efficient way to improve the strength and definition of your muscles. Many people don't mind some increase in muscle size, since this raises resting metabolic rate (the energy you burn at rest) and looks good. If larger muscles are not attractive to you, you can still improve muscle tone by lifting lighter weights.

For more information, please contact Robert J. Bovee at (585) 330-0614.