

What is Aerobic Exercise?

The word aerobic literally means "with oxygen" or "in the presence of oxygen." Aerobic activity trains the heart, lungs and cardiovascular system to process and deliver oxygen more quickly and efficiently to every part of the body. As the heart muscle becomes stronger and more efficient, a larger amount of blood can be pumped with each heartbeat. As a result, a fit individual can work longer, more vigorously and achieve a quicker recovery at the end of the aerobic session.

What things should I keep in mind before starting aerobic exercises?

There are three factors that you should keep in mind before starting any aerobic exercise. Frequency: most experts believe that 3-5 times per week of aerobic activity is fine. Duration: 20-60 minutes of an exercise session is considered optimal. Intensity: This refers to the percentage of your maximum heart at which you work. Experts believe that achieving 60-90% of age-specific maximal heart rate should be the target of an aerobics session.

Another simple measure of working at optimal intensity is the so called 'talk test.' You should be able to talk without gasping for air while working at optimal intensity. If you cannot, you should scale down. On the other hand if you are able to even sing then you should step up.

How to begin?

You should be careful not to start any kind of exercise suddenly and vigorously. This is especially true if you are starting for the very first time. Sudden and intensive exercise can cause more harm than good. It can lead to muscle injuries and sprains. A good idea is to start slowly and build up to a full program. Walking is the easiest way to begin a program. Start with a stroll for a mile or so and increase it by walking 3-4 miles per hour. As you feel more comfortable with walking a good distance, you might want to try another activity such as jogging, running or even aerobic or step classes. The most important thing is to be able to do any kind of aerobic exercise regularly. Therefore the best aerobic program is the one you enjoy and will stick to.

What is a warm-up, and how important is it in aerobic activity?

A warm-up helps your body prepare itself for exercise and reduces the chance of injury. Sudden and jerky movements of the muscles may lead to injury. The warm-up aims at raising the heart rate so that there is adequate blood flow to the muscles during activity. It also raises the temperature of the muscles so that they are able to withstand vigorous activity without sustaining injury. The warm-up exercise may be a slower version of the actual aerobic session. For example, you might want to walk before you jog, or do some aerobic dance movements before a step class. You should also aim at including all the muscles in your warm up.

What is a cool-down, and how important is it in aerobic activity?

After any aerobic activity, the blood is pooled in the extremities, and the heart rate is increased. The cool-down aims to bring the heart rate down to near-normal and to get the blood circulating freely back to the heart. Stopping abruptly could result in fainting or place undue stress on the heart. The cool-down should also include stretching to help relax the tired muscles.

Will working on a particular group of muscles like the tummy or thigh muscles, help me burn fat there?

No. Though the idea is very appealing and desirable but unfortunately it does not happen that way. When we're working a muscle or group of muscles to burn fat, we have no control over what part of the body we burn fat from. There is no such thing as "spot reducing". Fat generally is used up in pretty much the reverse order it was put on, (*LIFO - Last In First Out*). The effect is an overall improved fat percentage and body conditioning.

How long should I wait after eating to start exercising?

Whenever we take a meal, blood flow increases to the stomach and adjoining areas. Therefore vigorous exercise immediately after a heavy meal might lead to a feeling of dizziness and even vomiting. If you ate something fairly light, you probably don't need to wait very long. So depending on how heavy a meal you have had, you should wait between 30 minutes to 1 ½ hours.

Should I take sports drinks after a workout?

Most of the sports drinks in addition to electrolytes contain calories in the form of carbohydrates. You will probably burn between 300 and 450 kcal in an aerobics class. Keep the caloric content of the meal and any additional calories below that if you plan to lose weight. So if your objective is weight loss, then you are better off without sports drinks.

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