

Basic Training for Boomer Divas

Cardio Workout Guidelines for Fat Loss

There are a lot of different answers to the question: “How much exercise do I need to do?”. It really depends on what the person asking wants to achieve. In addition, the answers to the questions “How often?” and “How hard?” can vary for the same reason. Many boomer women are struggling with post-menopausal weight gain, so it is with this in mind that I’ve organized this lesson. I’ll answer those how much, how hard, and how often questions with regard to **fat loss**. In this lesson, I’ll concentrate on cardiovascular exercise, and then in our next lesson, I’ll cover strength exercise and its relation to weight loss.

I am a firm believer in moving most boomer women from their “long slow distance” workouts (e.g., 45 minutes on the elliptical or treadmill at a moderate pace), to High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT). Sounds scary, but it’s not. And it works. Big time.

Why is HIIT the best form of cardiovascular exercise in a fat loss program?

- It has a higher energy cost than “steady state” exercise
- It helps you maintain muscle mass
- It can boost your rate of metabolism for awhile *after* exercise
- It improves mobilization of stored fat from fat cells
- It may help reduce abdominal fat more than calorie restriction alone ¹

When I first started out in the fitness industry many years ago, the general recommendation for weight loss was cardiovascular exercise 4-6 days a week for 45-60 minutes each time at an intensity level of about 65-80% of one’s maximum heart rate (your estimated maximum heart rate is 220-minus your age). Now, things are changing a bit. This recommendation is still valid according to many fitness experts, but new research is challenging this theory.

New research findings suggest that short bursts of high intensity exercise followed by active rest periods may offer better fat loss results. Athletes have done these types of interval workouts for years in an effort to improve aerobic capacity, but now we’re finding that these workouts may be good for the rest of us as well! We’ve known that these workouts improve cardiovascular fitness, but recent studies show a new reason to try them: **improved fat burning ability**.

Studies show that doing bursts of high intensity exercise improves the body’s ability to burn fat. In order to better understand these research findings, I contacted the lead researcher for one of the more recent studies on this topic ². Here is what he said in an email to me: “*We have shown that interval training not*

only improves exercise performance and overall fitness, but improves the "potential" of the muscle to burn fat during exercise. Now, this doesn't mean that interval training burns fat, because high intensity exercise requires a faster burning fuel, like carbohydrates, but that if you do interval training, it improves your ability to burn fat during lower intensity exercise."

Here's how I see it: If you take a few of your "regular" cardio workouts and make them shorter, include high/low intensity segments, you'll burn more calories in those workouts than you would have at a lower intensity AND you'll become a better "fat burner" during your other, moderate intensity workouts. What's more, you'll be burning more calories long after your workout session is done! In case I haven't convinced you yet, there's another benefit to HIIT: Shorter workouts! With this intense training format, your workouts will be cut in half if you're a "45 minutes on the treadmill" girl.

There is no accepted formula for the ratio between hard work and moderate work/active rest. In fact, I believe the best thing to do is mix it up. The body is very adaptable. If you keep changing your workout, it can't adapt and get lazy.

A few important guidelines apply to interval training, though. The high-intensity phase should be hard enough that you get out of breath. Quite frankly, it should be kind of uncomfortable (but remember, it's a very short time segment!). Recovery periods should not last long enough for your pulse to return to its resting level. In addition, anyone with heart disease or high blood pressure should consult a physician before exercising at very high intensities. If you're new to interval training, start with just one or two sessions a week, and fill in the week with moderate aerobic exercise. As you become more accustomed to interval work, you can add in another interval day.

So, what's the "take home" information on this lesson? Barring any health or musculoskeletal issues that would prevent you from safely undertaking a high intensity interval training program, start working out HARD in short bursts! Always remember to warm up first for 3-10 minutes with low level activity, and then go for it with hard/easy cycles of exercise. You can do this with walking, running, on the treadmill, on the elliptical, even in the pool.

For weight loss I suggest 4-6 cardio workouts per week (just like we did in the old days!), however, I'd like to see several of these workouts be shorter, high intensity interval workouts. Again, I caution you to work in those high intensity interval workouts slowly. If you start out doing too many too soon, you risk injury. Start with 1 or 2 a week and work up to 3 a week over several months.

Here's a basic format you can follow if you're new to High Intensity Interval Training:

Warm up: 3-10 minutes (do whatever your cardio activity is, just at a lower level)
Hard Interval: 30 seconds
Recovery interval: 90 seconds

Cycle between “hard” and “recovery” intervals 4-6 times.

Cool down and stretch

As your fitness improves, you can extend your intervals up to 8-10 hard/easy segments per workout.

Boomer women are busy, and need time efficient workouts. Boomer women NEED High Intensity Interval Training!

References

- 1). Giannopoulou, et al. (2005). Exercise is required for visceral fat loss in postmenopausal women with Type 2 diabetes. *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* Vol. 90, No. 3 15511-1518.
- 2). Talanian, JL et a.l (2007). Two weeks of high-intensity aerobic interval training increases the capacity for fat oxidation during exercise in women. *Journal of Applied Physiology*, 102:1439-1447.

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