

# Kick Your Workout INTO HIGH GEAR with Cardio

Discover the health benefits  
of aerobic exercise



by Carol Ann Weber

It's no secret that weight training is essential to toning your body and maintaining your strength. But there's another form of exercise that often gets left by the wayside: cardio.

Cardiovascular exercise, also known as cardio or aerobic exercise, is any type of exercise that gets your heart rate up for a sustained period of time. While there are plenty of cardio machines in the gym, there are also plenty of ways to add aerobic exercise to your workout at home or in the great outdoors. This can include activities like dancing, jumping rope, jogging, hiking, swimming, cycling, or even walking.

Incorporating cardio into your workout boasts a variety of health benefits, from burning fat to increasing your stamina. But studies consistently show that it's the benefits you don't see that matter most—especially to your heart and brain.



## HEART-SMART WORKOUTS

Engaging in cardio helps maximize the amount of

oxygen in your blood. As your heart beats faster, your small blood vessels widen, delivering more oxygen to your muscles and carrying away waste products like carbon dioxide. Over time, adding cardio to your routine can increase your cardiorespiratory fitness.

Medical research shows that aerobic exercise can also lower specific risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD). One study that appeared in the *International Journal of General Medicine* reported that cardio improves cholesterol levels, supports healthy blood pressure, and reduces the risk of metabolic syndrome and diabetes. Regular aerobic exercise has also been found to help those with established heart disease, reducing chest pain in those with angina and preventing heart attacks. It also improves heart function in patients with heart failure and improves walking distance in people with peripheral artery disease.



## AEROBICS FOR YOUR BRAIN

Did you know that the brain starts losing tissue after you reach age 30? There is a way, however, to fight this. Scientists have found that, along with its

cardiovascular benefits, aerobic exercise can dramatically slow the loss of brain tissue as you age. In addition, studies on Alzheimer's patients conclude that participants already in the early stages of the disease exhibit improved brain function after participating in cardio exercise.

Another significant benefit of aerobics is the elevation of your mood. In a study of individuals diagnosed with depression, German researchers found that participants experienced significant mood changes after walking on the treadmill for 30 minutes a day for 10 days. The study concluded that "Aerobic exercise can produce substantial improvement in mood in patients with major depressive disorders in a short time."

## CARDIO + WEIGHTS OR WEIGHTS + CARDIO?

The majority of fitness experts will advise you to do your cardio *after* weight training. Here's why: if you do cardio first, you'll use much of the energy you need for an effective weight session. You'll also fatigue your muscles before you pick up your first kettlebell or resistance band. So save your cardio for after your weight session or schedule it for a day you don't plan to do resistance training.

## HOW MUCH CARDIO DO YOU NEED?

The American Heart Association recommends getting at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes per week of vigorous aerobic activity, preferably spread throughout the week. ■



### Carol Ann Weber's

500+ articles have been published in magazines such as *Fitness Rx*, *Muscle & Fitness*, *Oxygen*, and *Men's Fitness*. She has also been named the Academy of Bodybuilding and Fitness

"Best Columnist of the Year." Along with weight training, she enjoys yoga and a brisk walk anywhere outdoors.