

How to Improve:

Cardiovascular Fitness

Why Improve?

Cardiovascular fitness is a measure of how well your heart and lungs are able to transport oxygen to your muscles on demand. This has applications to almost everything, from climbing stairs and walking your dog, to sports like running, swimming, basketball and soccer, to 'emergencies' like rushing to catch an airplane or bus, being chased by a stranger, etc. Cardiovascular training also makes your heart muscle stronger, which means everyday activities are not as demanding. In addition, the extra calories used up during cardio activities can help you achieve or maintain a healthy weight.

Remember:

Warm up. Give your body systems a chance to gradually adjust to activity by starting slowly. A quick start will likely lead to early fatigue and a less effective exercise session.

Build gradually – distance or time, then intensity. Start with 15-20 minutes of continuous activity (running, cycling, swimming, dancing, etc.), and then add on a few minutes until you reach your time or distance goal (30 minutes, 2 miles, etc.). Once you are able to cover your time or distance comfortably, you can begin to increase the intensity by adding in short intervals of faster running, cycling, etc. Gradually increase the duration of the higher intensity intervals to achieve your new goal. Note: even at moderate intensities, you will receive health and fitness benefits, so it is not essential to work at high intensities unless you are training for a specific performance goal.

Monitor Intensity. Use your pulse, a heart rate monitor or rate your level of exertion. If your heart rate or level of exertion is at maximum, or you are unable to carry on a conversation while exercising, you may be working too hard. On a scale of 1-15, with 1 being rest and 15 being maximum effort, you should be working at 8-10 for the majority of your workouts. Increase to the higher levels for shorter bouts of higher intensity work when you are ready.

Consistency. The more frequent your exercise sessions, the more you will improve! Cardio training can be done 3-6 times per week for at least 20 minutes. A longer duration will result in more benefits.

