

The Truth about Cardiovascular Exercise, Part II by Tony Bevilacqua, CPT.

In the first article, the importance of nutrition was emphasized as the groundwork for a healthy cardiovascular system. Now, let's take a look at how we would actually train the cardiovascular system to be able to handle higher workloads. First and foremost, I want everyone to think about why they are or want to exercise. This is critical in figuring out how to train your cardiovascular system so it is most beneficial for you.

When the word "cardio" is used today visions of running on a treadmill or sitting on a bike or using an elliptical machine run through the minds of most people. Usually it entails anywhere from 10-60 minutes of continuous time spent on one of these machines at a specific "target" heart rate. Whatever form of cardiovascular exercise you do, remember one thing that seems quite obvious but is often overlooked...You will get better at whatever you practice. If you go to the gym and run, you will undoubtedly be a better runner. If you go outside and bike, you will be a better biker. If you swim 30 minutes a day, you will become a better swimmer. Truth of the matter is, most people do not start an exercise program with the intention of becoming a better runner or biker or swimmer, etc. Most of the population wants to get healthier (which was covered in part I), lose weight, and improve quality of life.

Take a little time and think about what types of physical activity you actually do during your day outside of your workout program. Do they entail running three miles out to your car? Do you have to bike to and from work everyday? Do you have to swim across a lake to get to the grocery store? Do you row a boat to your friend's house? I doubt it! So why is it that when we exercise we practice doing these activities for hours and hours on end, day after day. I blame the equipment manufacturers who have been extremely effective at creating this idea that you need to use one of their pieces of equipment as the only way to improve cardiovascular fitness. You will then miraculously become thinner, healthier and have a better quality of life. Sounds great on paper, but next time you are at the gym, take a look around at your fellow aerobic exercise junkies. In most cases they do not resemble the fitness models we see in the fitness product advertisements.

I want you to do something radical here. I want you to forget completely about cardiovascular exercise. That includes all the

traditional recommendations and thinking that go with it, like 30-60 minutes a day, fat burning zones, heart rates, etc. The exercise geeks have made cardiovascular exercise seem so difficult with all of the specifications and requirements. Whatever happened to just plain old physical activity? And it certainly does not have to be anything specific, just good ol' moving around. Let's actually take a look at what kind of physical demands your everyday life has. A normally functioning musculoskeletal system should be able to do 5 things...Locomotion, Level changes, Rotation, Pushing and Pulling.

1. Locomotion just means getting your body from point A to point B. Because we have cars and planes and trains we usually do not have to self propel ourselves over any long distances. Most of the time it is far less than a mile at a time.
2. Level changes are going from a low position to a high position. Something like getting up from a chair or sitting down into a chair, squatting down to pick something up, or getting out of bed in the morning.
3. Rotation refers to the body's natural ability to rotate. Often overlooked, we rotate in almost any physical activity we do. When we walk we rotate, when we reach for things we rotate and when we rake the lawn we rotate.
4. Pushing is pretty obvious, it entails pushing something away from the body using the arms.
5. Pulling is just the opposite. This refers to using the arms to pull something towards the body.

If we practice these movements consistently we get better at them. Because these movements are what our everyday life actually entail, these are the things we need to be practicing. If you consistently work on these areas, it will make you a better everyday life athlete. If you don't plan on becoming a competitive runner or biker or swimmer, I certainly would not spend a lot of time practicing those activities. When it would come time to perform a real life activity like lifting a box off the floor it will not help you in the least. It may actually make you less efficient at performing everyday life activities. Remember, you get better at whatever you practice. If your day only entails running, then by all means run, otherwise, train for your real life demands.

How does all of this tie in with cardiovascular exercise? Well, if you take the 5 movements above and perform exercises that work on those areas, your cardiovascular system will automatically adapt to the demands of those particular movements. You don't have to worry about heart rate and training zones, just get your work done and enjoy your day. You see, cardiovascular exercise is really not a general thing. It specifically adapts to the demands placed on it. Without a question Lance Armstrong is one of the greatest endurance athletes ever, but I can assure you he could not go out and win the ironman tomorrow if he tried. It is not because he isn't fit, in fact, he probably has a higher VO2 max than the number 1 triathlete in the world, but he would not be a competitor simply because he has not trained his body for that type of activity.

It is time to start challenging tradition! We need to start questioning old methods and stop doing things simply because "that is how it has always been done," or "that is what the experts in men's health said". We need to aggressively pursue strategies that actually work without worrying about what others will say or think. Remember you can never argue with results!! Until the next article, have a healthy and happy day!

In Part III I will discuss one of my favorite topics...cardiovascular exercise and weight loss.

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