

The Truth about Cardiovascular Exercise, Part III

By Tony Bevilacqua, CPT.

Cardiovascular exercise and weight loss is an extremely misunderstood concept. After all, how many people out there have been doing huge amounts of cardiovascular exercise without losing any weight? They are undoubtedly better bikers, runner, ellipticizers, or whatever activity they have been working on, but they still have not reached their original goal of weight loss.

I just want to start by dispelling a myth about exercise and weight loss. This is very important and could upset a lot of people but this is the real deal...EXERCISE IS NOT GOOD FOR WEIGHT LOSS. It doesn't matter what kind or how much or what intensity, it just does not work! Most of you are probably saying to yourselves this guy has lost his mind, but just follow along here and I will explain why. I am probably one of the only fitness professionals around who would make this statement but let me assure you, it's the truth. The reason you will not hear many fitness gurus say something this bold is because we have been taught from day one that exercise *is* good for weight loss. It is awfully hard to go against all your old teachings, but we need to take a look around and notice that it is not working. At any given time just go to the gym and see how many exercisers are carrying extra weight they should not be. They will often blame it on doing the wrong exercise or not doing enough or whatever. Truth is; they should be looking at what they are putting into their body.

As everyone knows, the only way to really lose weight is to burn more calories than you take in. This is a cold hard fact. There are no magic pills, no magic exercise programs, no magic spells, etc. So first and foremost stop spending your money on all the hype. Another fact is that exercise does burn calories. Depending on the intensity and duration we can burn a good amount. So why doesn't it work for weight loss?

The number 1 best way to lose weight is to change the way you eat. The thought for most people is that if I keep my eating habits the same and incorporate exercise into my life I will undoubtedly start to lose weight. It sounds so easy, and for most, exercising is actually a lot easier than changing eating habits. A typical 45 minute, moderate intensity exercise program will burn somewhere around 200-300 calories. So let's say you burn 300 calories during your workout and you don't modify the way you eat. I can guarantee you that your body

will find a way to get that 300 calories back that you just spent 45 minutes burning off.

It is amazing at how sneaky your body can be. It just knows that it is in a calorie deficit and will find a way to get it back, especially if you have decided in the beginning that you were not going to change your eating habits. So you aren't even aware of the two extra cookies that you ate were equivalent to those 300 calories. Yes, I said 2 extra cookies! That is all that it takes to put back the 300 calories you just tried so hard to burn. This cycle continues and your goals of being slim become a distant memory. If your only reason for exercising was to lose weight, most people at this point will stop and the feelings of failure will set in.

Next time you are thinking about going down this road, I want you to completely change your strategy. Change the way you eat and start losing weight, then incorporate exercise into your routine for the sole purpose of getting fit and feeling better. Completely remove the relationship between exercise and weight loss from your mind. The only relationship your mind should make when you are thinking about losing weight is changing your eating habits. These are the people who have huge success with weight loss. I will let you in on a little secret. If your only goal is to lose some weight, you could get away with never doing any exercise. Look at Weight Watchers and how many people they have helped lose weight without exercise. A person who does not exercise at all has the same chances of losing weight as someone who exercises all the time. All it takes is some dietary manipulation.

Again, I am first and foremost a fitness professional and firmly believe that everyone should incorporate a sound exercise program into their life, but you need to exercise for the right reasons. Unfortunately, weight loss is not one of the better ones.

I just want to wrap up this article with a few more thoughts on cardiovascular exercise. I want you to erase some common old school thoughts about exercise. This is radical stuff so really open your mind and follow me here. We have been led to believe that a good exercise program should be broken down into 2 parts...cardio and weights. So often times it is off to the gym to some "lifting" and then over to the treadmill to get in some "cardio". Let's go back to looking at your everyday life. Does your everyday life split up your "cardio" and your "lifting"? Absolutely not! And really, do we ever perform one type of movement over and over again repetitiously for 30-60 minutes at a

time? No, not usually. How about cleaning the house? Is that cardio? Well, yes, it has a cardiovascular component, but it also involves the 5 basic movements of the human body...locomotion, level changes, rotation, pushing and pulling. All of these motions are used in infinite different ways while cleaning the house, and instead of maintaining one steady heart rate for the duration, your heart rate changes continuously depending on the type of movement or task you are doing at the time. Flipping a mattress will illicit a higher heart rate response than vacuuming the floor, but both activities may be performed back to back.

Everything we do in our lives is "cardio". Sleeping at night is cardio, eating is cardio, and any type of exercise we do is cardio. The point is to change your thinking about cardio and when exercising stop worrying about where your heart rate is or whether or not you are going fast enough. If your goal is to get your heart rate up all you need to do is any activity that requires more blood flow to the muscles (i.e. work harder). Activities that should be performed should be as close as possible to the activities you may encounter in everyday life. These activities should always include some form of locomotion, level changes, rotation, pushing and pulling. By changing different variables such as intensity and duration you can work at many different heart rates and cover lots of different movements which will take care of the cardio component along with teaching the musculoskeletal system how to function at a higher level. Not to mention this type of training can be a lot more fun than 30 minutes on a treadmill or bike.

This concludes my series about cardiovascular exercise. I hope this information has been extremely helpful for people and if anything opened your mind. Just remember to always try and have fun with exercise. There are so many things that you can do to improve your fitness level that you should never have to train in a one dimensional world. Your body is capable of so much more!

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