



Beaverdale

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Fitness

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Pilates

Q & A: What Should my Heart Rate be During Exercise?

This is a very common question I hear and how I wish I had a simple, easy answer, but unfortunately there isn't. It depends on your natural heart rate, the shape you are currently in, and what your fitness goals are. So let me try to explain and give you some guidelines to ensure that you are exercising at an intensity that is safe but also will improve your fitness.

Heart rate is a very individual thing. Some people have very low resting heart rates and others have very fast resting and exercising heart rates. There is a formula that is very often used to estimate your exercising heart rate zones. Take 220 and subtract your age. This *estimates* your maximum heart rate. Then you should exercise at some percentage of this maximum heart rate depending on your goals. However, because there is such a wide range of natural heart rates among us, this number only gives an average and isn't useful at all. Take me for example. I am 50 so my estimated maximum heart rate should be 170. But I can still get my heart rate up to 195 under intense exertion and can maintain a heart rate of 185 for an hour in bike races. So if I exercised at 70% of my estimated maximum heart rate of 170, that would put me at 120. Well, that would prevent me from even riding my bike because as soon as I start riding easily, my heart rate exceeds 120. So the point is, forget the '220 – your age' formula. It most likely doesn't work and will cause you to exercise at a point below where you will get much benefit.

So how should you determine your own unique exercise heart rate? Below are some guidelines and suggestions. But first, let me describe the various ranges and the types of fitness each will give you. If you are just starting out with exercise and you haven't been active before, then you should just start moving, period. All you need to do is get your heart rate above the everyday heart rate zone, so aim for approximately 50-65% of your maximum heart rate. This isn't strenuous exercise at all. You can accomplish this through walking or other mild cardiovascular exercise. This will begin to build your conditioning and build endurance. If your goal is to improve your cardiovascular fitness more, then you will want to work at 65-80% of your maximum heart rate zone. This is where you are breathing hard, perspiring, and feeling like you are doing hard work, because you are. Running at a moderate pace will get you into this zone. If your goal is some sort of athletic competition where you want to perform well, such as a 10K running race or a triathlon, you will need to do some of your exercise in the 80-90% of maximum range. This is a really hard effort and you will be breathing very hard – you will actually become out of breath if you do this very long. This zone is only necessary for athletes who want to improve their performance. You certainly don't need to work this hard just to become healthy and fit. Before I go any further, keep in mind that ***you need clearance from your physician before doing any strenuous exercise*** – you want to make sure your heart and body are ready for this stress.

OK, so I still haven't told you how to determine your own individual maximum heart rate, and to tell you the truth I am not going to. Testing your maximum heart rate is an extremely strenuous test and should only be done under medical supervision, such as through a 'stress test' at a doctor's office. But the good news is, you don't need to know your maximum heart rate to determine your appropriate exercise zones. Here's a better and safer way. It's called the 'talk test'. You can determine your effort level by how hard you are breathing while you exercise. When exercising easily, such as when just beginning an exercise program, you should find yourself breathing harder than normal, but not so hard that you can't carry on a conversation. So if you go for a walk or bike ride with a friend, you should be able to carry on a conversation without gasping for breath. Check your heart rate and aim for this level when exercising. This will put you in the 50-65% of max heart rate range.

Two ways to measure your heart rate: 1) Put your middle finger to the side of your Adams Apple on your neck. With some practice you will be able to feel a strong pulse in your neck artery. While exercising you can feel your pulse and count heartbeats during a 6 second period, multiply by 10 and that's your heart rate (per minute). 2) If you plan to use heart rate frequently to determine your exercise level, you should consider investing in a heart rate monitor. You wear a chest strap and a heart rate monitor (which is like a wrist watch) and it gives you a continuous reading. By the way, these chest straps are also compatible with our treadmills, stationary bikes and elliptical machines in the fitness center – they will read out on the screen.

If have been exercising a while and want take your fitness to the next level, then you are going to want to get your heart rate up to the 65-80% of max heart rate range. A simple test to determine when you are at this point is when you cannot speak a complete sentence without stopping to take a breath part way through the sentence. This means you are breathing quite rapidly and you are at the point where you need to breathe deeply and often to supply oxygen to your working muscles at a fast rate. Give this a try the next time and see if you can (..gasp..) finish saying a sentence without breathing or not. If you can't, then you are likely around 80% of your max heart rate. Note this heart rate and aim for this in future exercise sessions. Finally, if you are looking to improve your athletic improvement, then you want to find your heart rate at the point where you are 'out of breath' and feel like you can't continue. In fact, you won't be able to continue this pace for more than a few minutes. This will be in the 80-90% of your maximum heart rate range.

Hopefully this gives you a little better idea for determining your heart rate ranges and answers some questions about your appropriate range. This is why I can't tell you a number when you ask this question. If you have additional questions, don't hesitate to ask David (689-1254).

Quick Fit Tip of the Month: On average people gain about a pound of weight (mostly fat) per year. This comes from eating 9 calories more per day more than you burn off. That's right, just NINE calories! Your body actually does a pretty good job of regulating the amount of food it wants you to eat. Help it out by getting regular exercise. This will help your 'appetate' be better able to keep you from overeating and to burn off any excess you do eat.

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