



Smart Cardio For Strength, Mass & Fat Loss!

If you're a typical guy who loves to lift big weights, but considers anything over 3 reps to be "endurance" training, you might not be interested in this article. However, if you can bench press a Buick but get winded when you bend down to tie your shoes, maybe I have an audience.

Look, we all do what we LIKE to do, but only the most successful among us find a way to also do what we NEED to do. If you think you're in the latter category, listen up. I've got a quiver full of fun, challenging, cardio workouts that help you lose fat without losing strength or muscle.

Why You Need Cardio

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that cardio will turn you into a wispy, estrogen-soaked shadow of your former self - too many guys use this mindset as an excuse to avoid what they know they should be doing. In fact, the benefits of smart cardio training are too numerous to ignore.

They include:

- Cardiovascular Health: This might not sound so exciting, but believe me, a heart attack or stroke won't help you lift bigger weights, will it? Good health is the foundation of everything else, including your weight workouts.

Think back to the parable of the farmer who discovered a goose who laid golden eggs - after a while, the farmer lost patience, and killed the goose to get all of the eggs all at once. Of course, when he opened the goose, there were no eggs inside. Don't kill the goose (your health) that lays golden eggs (a lifetime of productive workouts).

- Fat Loss: If I still haven't convinced you by using the health argument, then this benefit should catch your attention. While it's POSSIBLE to get super lean by lifting alone, it's a lot easier if you add a cardiovascular component to your program. Cardio workouts create a greater energy deficit, elevate metabolism, and initiate the secretion of important fat-mobilizing hormones. Don't worry, you won't lose muscle or strength, if you follow my suggestions in this article.



- Active Recovery: We've known for a long time that ANY form of "contrasting" stress promotes a faster recovery from your primary training activity. For guys who primarily lift weights, that means cardio. Now if you've tried this approach before and it didn't work, it's almost certainly because you failed to carefully integrate the cardio into your existing program. More on that later.
- Injury Prevention: Cardiovascular exercise mobilizes joints, increases blood flow to various tissues, and generally improves overall functioning. Really. Just trust me.
- Everyday Function: I hate to be the one to clue you into this, but there are some very important everyday functions that require more than the ability to exert maximum force for 1-2 seconds. Things like walking across the street, playing with your kids, taking a shower, stuff like that.

Now, you might not have terrible endurance capacity now, but after a few decades of cardio avoidance, you will. So don't even go there - you really CAN have it all - impressive muscularity, scary levels of maximum strength, and a healthy heart to boot. Follow along:

Four Principles Of Effective Cardio Training

Before I introduce you to my favorite cardio tricks, I'd like to share a few general principles that will make your cardiovascular sessions a lot more fun and rewarding:

1. Variation Prevents Injury, Boredom, and Dropout: Here's a little analogy that I use with my athletes: unfurl a paper clip into a straight piece of wire, and then start bending it back and forth, eventually you'll break it. Think of your body that way. There's no need to use a single activity (such as running or biking) for your cardio workouts.

After all, your heart, lungs, and circulatory system don't know what exercise activity is taking place - but your joint sure do. If you use running for all your cardio workouts for example, your knees and feet take a heavy beating. But if you distribute the workout among 2-3 activities, such as running, swimming, and cycling, you'll be less prone to overuse injury, and you'll have more fun to boot.

2. Quality Before Quantity: We all pay lip service to this principle, but how few of us actually employ it! Make sure your exercise technique is consistent at all times, no matter what. Know your best times for the various distances you cover and then, in your workouts, always stay close to those times.

Finally, a quality performance is a pain-free performance. If you're experiencing elbow pain during a swim for example, change gears until you determine what's wrong.

3. Challenge Yourself And Have Fun: I have a neighbor who's simultaneously fascinated and disturbed by my devotion to physical training. He'll often walk past my garage while I'm lifting and exclaim "Better you than me" or words to that effect. I always respond that I only train because I love it.

Look, if you can't find some fun in your training, you'll never last. So if you hate cardio, you'll need to play some games with yourself to get in the mood. I think the best way to accomplish this is to challenge yourself.



Keep a detailed training journal and record your PR's for everything you do. This adds purpose and excitement to your training.

4. No Fuss Gets The Job Done: I think the reason that a lot of people find exercise so tedious is because of all the pre-workout preparations - getting dressed in your "workout gear," waiting for the perfect weather conditions, and taking your pre-workout supplements, just to name a few.

Try to adopt a "no preparation" attitude toward training. Don't worry what your hair looks like, if it's raining out, if you've got your running shorts on, or if you'll be sweaty while you're at the grocery store afterwards.

People often tell me that they dread the thought of doing cardio, but once they're doing it, it's not so bad. If you can relate, try to minimize the pre-workout gyrations. Just get out and do it.

Lose The Fat, Keep The Muscle: My Favorite Cardio Training Methods.

The following 8 training methods have a few things in common: They're efficient, fun, challenging, time-efficient, practical, and most of all, they deliver.

1. Out & Back: This is both a training method and an assessment tool, especially for beginners or lifters who haven't done any cardio in a while. The idea is to cover a measured distance (you can run, bike, swim, skate, or whatever form of locomotion you happen to like) such that the "return" trip is performed in the same time (or less) than the "out" trip. Let's say you decide you're going to go out for a jog for example.

Your goal is to jog to a nearby park and then turn around and come back. With the out and back method, your goal is to establish a pace that enables you to complete your return trip in the same time as your out trip. If the return trip takes longer than the out trip, it indicates that you're fatiguing faster than you should be - in other words, you're running beyond your current abilities.

You can even use the out and back method with cardio machines in your gym - if, for example, you plan to use the elliptical trainer for 20 minutes, notice how much work you do in the first 10 minutes (usually this will be displayed as distance, or, alternatively, in watts). Then strive to equal or surpass this workload in the remaining 10 minutes.

2. **Timed Miles:** If you haven't done any running in a while, you might be surprised at how much you suck at it. In fact, if you go out and try to run one mile, chances are you won't be able to finish at all. So don't even try. Instead, measure a one mile course (maybe 1/2 mile out, and 1/2 mile back), and go out and cover that course, through a combination of walking, running, jogging, whatever.

The main thing is to record your time, no matter how bad it might be. Then, the next time you go out, simply beat that time. And you will. Gradually, workout by workout, you'll be running more and walking less. And you'll experience a steady stream of PR's to keep your motivation flying.

3. **400's:** 400's are one of the best fat-loss workouts you can ever do - just look at the physiques of top 400-meter sprinters if you still need convincing! Get on out to your local high school track (if it's close to home, walk instead of drive - that'll be your warm-up).

Once around is 400 meters. The current men's World record is less than 44 seconds, which will soon strike you as un-Godly as you try your hand at this simple but punitive track & field event! So first time out, go VERY easy for the first 200 meters, and then pick up the pace for the final kick if you still have anything left in the tank. Record your time.

After about 4-5 minutes rest, run one more and try to beat your PR. That's it for the first workout. You can run 400's about twice a week, but start small and increase your reps very gradually. After several months, you'll find you can do maybe 5 repeats per workout.

4. **Hills:** Running hills is a fun but intense cardiovascular workout with important strength-enhancing benefits to boot. Best of all, the inclined surface minimizes impact and spares your joints. Find a moderate slope that takes you about 10-20 seconds to climb at maximum effort. First time out, limit yourself to 3-5 reps. Gradually increase to 10-12 reps after several weeks. And of course, time every sprint and always seek to beat your PR's!
5. **Tabata Protocol:** Recently, Dr. Tabata in Japan conducted a study in which he investigated the benefits of high intensity anaerobic exercise. Tabata discovered that a protocol consisting of 20 seconds of all-out cycling followed by 10 seconds of moderate cycling for a total of four minutes (8 repeats) was just as effective as forty-five minutes of aerobic exercise.

Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly to some, the Tabata Protocol increases aerobic fitness in addition to its anaerobic benefits. This finding is consistent with my "ladder" paradigm that states that higher intensity training develops a wider spectrum of fitness benefits than lower-intensity exercise.

Clearly, the hallmark of this method is its time-efficiency, but there is a price to pay in pain and sweat - choose your poison!

6. Dot Drill: I realize that most weight-trainers think they own the market on pain-tolerance, but the dot drill makes 20-rep squats look like a trip to Baskin Robbins by comparison. Particularly insidious is the fact that, unlike resistance training, repeated exposures to the dots will not make subsequent exposures any easier.

First conceived by basketball coach Adolph Rupp in the 1940's, and then later popularized by Bigger Faster Stronger Inc. a few decades later, the dot drill is both a remarkable agility, foot strength, and anaerobic conditioning exercise, as well as a superb and easy-to-administer testing tool.

It is unique in that it creates not only a high level of fatigue, but also a high quality of fatigue- fighters in particular will be able to relate to the feeling of panic that ensues when your heart rate soars to about 120% of age-predicted maximum.

The dot drill is a battery of 5 separate drills, performed in rapid succession, with each drill performed six times in a row before proceeding to the next drill (please refer to the diagram as you read the description).

Dot Drill Schematic



The dot drill features 5, five-inch diameter dots orientated in a pattern similar to the five dots on a pair of dice, expect that the "square" is three feet by two feet. Use a solid surface such as weight room matting, and tie your shoelaces. Tight.

Begin the drill as follows:

1. First drill: Starting position: your left foot is on "A" and your right foot on "B." Hop forward and touch "C" with both feet simultaneously, then continue forward so that your left foot lands on "D" at the same instant

your right foot lands on "E." (a total of 2 hops). Now go back to the starting position by reversing what you just did (hopping backward). That's one rep. Repeat for a total of six reps.

2. Second drill: From the starting position, lift your left foot in the air and with right foot only, hop to "C," "E," "D," "C," "A," and back to "B." That's one rep. Repeat for a total of six reps.
3. Third drill: Repeat the last drill but using the left foot only (hop to "C," "E," "D," "C," "A," and back to "B.") That's one rep. Repeat for a total of six reps.
4. Fourth drill: Repeat the last drill but using both feet, keeping the feet together- this looks somewhat like a skiing drill. Repeat for a total of six reps.
5. Fifth drill: This is very similar to drill number one, with a slight variation: When you reach the top of the pattern (left foot on "D" and your right foot on "E."), instead of hopping backward to get back to the starting position, you instead jump-spin and land on the same two dots (only now your left foot will be on "E" and your right foot on "D."), facing the opposite direction.

Then hop forward and touch "C" with both feet simultaneously, then continue forward so that your left foot lands on "B" and your right foot on "A." Lastly, jump-spin again to assume the starting position. That's one rep. Repeat for a total of six reps.

Errors: Subtract .10 seconds for every missed dot from the total time.

Once you've done the drill a few times, you'll notice that you can't help but be competitive once you start. Even if you don't feel terribly motivated, you'll bust a gut trying to get a good time. Or maybe it's just that you want to get it over with. Either way, the dot drill brings out your best (and I'm not referring to your last meal).

Implementing The Dot Drill

The five dots of death (as my athletes refer to it) can be used as a warm-up for a strength training session (one drill will bring your heart rate to 100% and will get you sweating big-time), as anaerobic conditioning, and/or as a fantastic foot and calf strengthening tool.

One precaution however: I suggest never doing more than 4 repetitions of the dot drill on any given day, and not more than 12 dot drills on any given week.

Dot Drill Standards

OK, you've done the dot drill a handful of times and you think you're a stud (or studette) because you finally broke the two minute barrier? According to Bigger Faster Stronger, you'll need to break the 60 second barrier to be considered fast (for a complete listing of the BFS dot drill standards, point your browser to <http://www.biggerfasterstronger.com>).

7. Tethered Pool Sprints: I live in Phoenix and hot weather is fast approaching. It often becomes tedious to get out there for sprints when the temperature is well over 100 degrees. If you've got a pool, and it's never occurred to you that you can use it for exercise because it's too small, try this: call around to some pool supply and/or diving shops and find an elastic cord with a nylon waist-belt.

You attach the band to one side of the pool, and attach the band to your waist. Attach the band in such a way that you can just barely reach the other side of the pool through an all-out sprint. Once you touch the other end, relax as the band pulls you back. Then repeat for the desired numbers of reps. This is a brutally tough and effective form of anaerobic exercise that delivers the fat loss goods in spades.

8. Fast High Repetition Overhead Lifting: I've added this last option for those of you who still have a hard time stomaching any "non-lifting" form of cardio. In this case we're talking about various forms of snatches - a fast lift where the weight is "snatched" to an overhead position.

Of course, the snatch is one of the two Olympic lifting events, but there are several one-arm variants as well, including the one-arm dumbbell snatch, the kettlebell snatch, and the one-arm barbell snatch.



Double Kettlebell Snatch.

All of these lifts create high levels of cardio-respiratory fatigue, in addition to the obvious speed strength and shoulder-function benefits. On top of that, snatches are actually fun!

Integrating Cardio With Weights

As you begin to initiate some of these cardio workouts, realize that you're significantly increasing the demands on your body. I strongly suggest cutting back on the volume of your weight training exercises to make way for these new workouts.

The simplest way to do this is to cut your sets in half- in other words, if you normally do 4 sets of 8, cut it back to 2 sets of 8- at least for the first few months. You'll find that this approach will allow you to maintain both your strength and orthopedic health as you begin to address your cardiovascular fitness needs.

Following the suggestions I've presented here, you'll enjoy the health and fat loss benefits of a cardiovascular exercise program, and, who knows, you might even become a "former" cardio hater!