

Training Intensity

Exercising at different levels of intensity will meet different fitness and athletic goals. Some intensities burn more fat, some increase endurance, some develop speed, and some focus on strengthening your heart. As you increase intensity (workload) during your exercise, your body responds differently at various levels of exercise.

For athletes training for general fitness, these levels are not so important, but for an athlete training for success in a race/event, these levels become important. You will need a heart rate monitor to do this. You will also need to determine your Maximum Heart Rate (HR Max). There are 3 ways to do this:

- Take your age and subtract it from 220.
- Run or bike up a steep hill at a hard effort for 2 minutes twice. Use your heart rate monitor or count your heart rate immediately after you stop each time for 10 seconds and multiply it by 6.
- Use the highest number you have noticed during a hard intensity workout or race.

LEVEL 1 - Easy aerobic endurance or over distance.

60-70% of maximum heart rate (HR Max).

In this zone your body is using completely aerobic energy sources. Your heart and lungs easily provide the needed oxygen for your activity. Training in this level is low intensity and is used for easy distance sessions. You should be able to speak in complete sentences while in this level. Most athletes train too hard to recover on their easy days. By training at this level you will build your aerobic foundation. 70 - 90% of training time should be spent in this level.

LEVEL 2 - General Endurance

70-80% of maximum heart rate (HR Max).

As you increase intensity in this level, your body increases the amount of anaerobic energy needed. Your heart and lungs are more challenged to meet the oxygen demands. Some coaches call this level the “No- Training Level”. Surprisingly most recreational athletes and many serious athletes tend to do most of their training in this zone. By doing so, they are violating many of the principals of training, including overload (easier than competitive intensity), specificity (becoming efficient at a speed or intensity required for performance), and recovery (working too hard to recover).

Little time is spent in this level.

LEVEL 3 - Threshold and endurance speed.

80-85% of maximum heart rate (HR Max).

Consistent 1 hour race pace. Steady state workouts are very effective in this level.

A fast and comfortable feeling should accommodate workouts in this level.

LEVEL 4 - Endurance race pace and VO2 Max.

85-100% of maximum heart rate (HR Max).

In this level your body is heavily reliant on anaerobic energy sources. You will rapidly build an oxygen debt. You will not be able to maintain this level of exertion for long periods of time. Level 4 work is fundamental to improve performance.