

DETERMINING YOUR HEART RATE

Exercise module

Aerobic activities strengthen your heart. For an activity to be considered aerobic, it must be performed at an intensity that makes your heart work harder than it normally does and increases your breathing rate. The intensity of an activity can be estimated by how you feel or how hard you are breathing. For general cardio training, a good rule of thumb is to go hard enough so you can't whistle or sing.

A more precise way to estimate your intensity is to use your heart rate (HR). You can measure your HR using a variety of ways. Most exercise equipment has an HR monitor built into the handles and simply holding on to them for a few seconds will let the machine display your value. If you want to know your HR while you are on the move, you can use a HR monitor watch that either has a chest strap or sensors that detect your HR directly from your skin under the strap. You can also use a Bluetooth HR strap that sends your reading directly to your smart phone or tablet to display. However, the cheapest HR monitor is the combination of your index finger and middle finger. Lightly press the inside of your wrist on the same side of your thumb or the side of your neck directly over your carotid artery. Count the number of pulses you feel for 10 seconds and multiply by six.

Calculate Heart Rate (HR)

Look at the formula below and calculate your own heart rate (HR) in beats per minute (BPM):

Step 1: Determine Your Maximum HR

Subtract your age in years from 220 to estimate your maximum HR

220 - My Age = my max HR. Write your answer here _____ BPM

Step 2: Determine Your HR Zones

Zone 1 (50% to 60%) = sick days, recovery days or easing into exercise

Zone 2 (60% to 70%) = endurance, weight loss, general fitness

Zone 3 (70% to 80%) = stamina improving fitness or training for a race

Zone 4 (80% to 85%) = red line zone, don't stay here very long

Example: Suzie is a 40 year person who has a max HR of 180 BPM ($220 - 40 = 180$). She would keep her HR between 108 – 126 BPM for Zone 2 exercise. If she decided to sign up for a 5K race, she would start to do more of her training in Zone 3. For her, that would be 126 – 144 BPM (70% – 80%). She might occasionally go to Zone 4 when she's in good shape (144 – 155 BPM or 80% – 85%).

In general, exercising continuously for at least 20 minutes, three days per week is the best way to improve your heart fitness. Exercising longer (30 – 60 minutes) is more helpful for even better fitness and weight reduction. The American Heart Association recommends getting 150 minutes of activity every week.