

Interval Training: comparable levels of conditioning in less time

With every change of season I notice an increase in people shopping for gym memberships and/or the services of professional trainers. Apparently a change of season often motivates one to make a positive change in oneself. Not infrequently the individual has tried previously to make a positive physical change with little or no success. Some of the most frequent reasons for failing to improve fitness levels are lack of time & lack of enjoyment of the time spent achieving the improvement in fitness. These reasons for failure are not insignificant. As you get older your need for physical activity increases but so do your time constraints. To add to the frustration slogging along for hours of endurance training was boring, time consuming, and didn't work for you anyway.

Well here is some relief. You may not be the problem! Unless you are training for an endurance sport you need very little, if any, endurance training! The average person needs strength & power (bursts of energy) to operate in day to day living. To get out of a bed or a chair takes power not endurance, bringing the groceries in the house or crossing the street requires power not endurance, climbing stairs with the groceries or avoiding a car while crossing the street takes even more power but not endurance.

Enter interval training. The practice of interval training, -alternating short bouts of high intensity exercise with longer periods of recovery is what the leanest and most powerful athletes have practiced for years, since it replicates the brief and intense bursts of energy required in most sports. Due to these characteristics interval training should play a role in fitness training for the most common demands of day to day life and here's the bonus, it takes less time!

The dramatic potential of interval training was shown in a recent study. In the study two groups of college age males exercised on stationary bicycles three times a week over a two-week period. One group worked out at peak intensity for thirty seconds, followed by four minutes of slow pedaling for active recovery, during a 20-minute session. The other group rode at a steady moderate pace for 90 to 120 minutes per session.

After two weeks, researchers tested each participants muscle tissue for an enzyme that indicates how efficiently the muscle is using oxygen. To their surprise, both groups exhibited roughly the same increase in enzyme level-around 25 to 35 percent. This suggests interval training offers the same benefits as less intense, more prolonged exercise in only a fraction of the time. This study gives hope to those that have fallen victim to the boredom & seemingly slow progress of moderate paced exercise. Elite level training centers are finding interval training the most efficient way to develop the ability to produce bursts of energy and the most effective place for steady moderate paced exercise is to prepare trainees for interval training or as a modality for recovery.

You should consider these strategies as well.

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