

A Guide to Cardiovascular Machine Workouts

Treadmill

Not much needs to be said about the treadmill, it's one of the easiest cardio machines to get started on. But here's a couple of important tips: Start slow. When getting on the machine and starting it up, be sure to start the belt out slowly so you can safely step on to it and begin walking. Pay attention to your form. Whether you're walking or jogging, keep your torso lifted, shoulders relaxed (not hunched), head up, arms swinging naturally by your side, and strike the belt with your heel then roll through to push off with your toe. Don't be modest, if there's a mirror in front of you, look at yourself and check your form while you're working out.

The 30-Minute Workout

Begin with a 5 minute warm-up walking slowly, approximately 1-2 mph. Concentrate on your form, vary your strides and feel your muscles begin to warm and loosen up. Gradually build your speed to a level that puts you into your target heart rate zone. Continue working in this zone for approximately 20 minutes. Vary your speed and elevation during this time to add some variety and allow your muscles to get a well rounded workout. The last 5 minutes are spent cooling down. Gradually slow yourself and the treadmill down over this 5 minute period. Don't stop abruptly, use this time to let your body cool off and get your heart rate down. Once you get to a pace that's slow and easy, do some neck and shoulder rolls and shake out your legs, arms and hands.

Stationery Cycle

This is another easy piece of equipment to start out on without the joint impact of the treadmill. Here's a few things to keep in mind when working out on the stationery cycle: Adjust the seat to your body. When you sit on the cycle's seat with your foot on the pedal in it's lowest position, there should only be a slight bend in your knee, approximately 25-35 degrees. Watch your form. Pay close attention to your upper body, don't slouch over the handlebars. Keep your torso lifted, shoulders relaxed and head lifted. Don't be afraid to stand. If you're really getting into your ride and want to vary the intensity, crank up the resistance and pedal while standing out of your seat. It adds some variety and helps prevent a sore butt from sitting.

The 30-Minute Workout

Begin with a 5 minute warm-up pedaling slowly, without resistance. Concentrate on your form and gradually start building speed to a level that puts you into your target heart rate zone. Work in your target heart rate zone for 20 minutes while varying your speed and resistance. Spend the last 5 minutes cooling down by gradually slowing your pedaling speed and reducing resistance. Don't stop abruptly, use this time to let your body cool off and get your heart rate down. As your heart rate begins to decrease, let go of the handlebars, sit upright and loosen up your upper body. Try doing neck and shoulder rolls, stretch your torso by reaching up to the ceiling with your hands and cross your arms in front and give yourself a hug while you stretch out your upper back.

Stair Machine

Climbing stairs is another popular activity that provides a great calorie burn. Stair machines are lower impact and don't place a great deal of stress on your joints. These are fairly easy machines to master once you get the feel and get a rhythm going. A few pointers though: Don't lean on the handrails. This is perhaps the most common mistake stair climbers make. Leaning on the handrails significantly decreases the effect of the workout (okay, let's be honest... it's cheating!) Keep your body centered. When you first start out on the stair machine, keeping your body centered over the stair pedals can be easier said than done. Lightly hold the handrails to help keep yourself directly over the pedals until you gain some equilibrium on the machine. Pay attention to your form. Maintain an erect, natural posture, head up, shoulders relaxed and hands gently holding on to the handrails.

The 30-Minute Workout

Begin with a 5 minute warm-up slowly climbing the stairs. Concentrate on your form and center your body over the pedals. Gradually build your climbing speed and resistance to a level that puts you into your target heart rate zone. Stay in your target heart rate zone for 20 minutes. During this time, vary your stepping speed, resistance and the depth of your steps. Taking slow deep steps will work your muscles differently than taking short quick steps and will provide your muscles with a well rounded workout. When you feel you've mastered your balance using the handrails, let go with one hand and alternate with the other. Pump your arm in the same motion you would walking up a flight of stairs. When that gets comfortable, let go of the handrails with both hands and learn to step without using the rails. You'll get the maximum effect of your workout this way and gain a great sense of balance! The last 5 minutes are spent cooling down. Gradually slow your speed and resistance. Don't stop abruptly, use this time to let your body cool off and get your heart rate down. Once you get to a pace that's slow and easy, do some neck and shoulder rolls and shake out your arms and hands.

NordicTrack

This machine simulates cross-country skiing. It's a terrific workout with virtually no impact on your joints. It takes a little getting used to at first, but with a bit of practice you'll be skiing across the tundra! To get started, step into the toe cups and lean slightly forward into the hip pad. The hip pad should be adjusted to approximately an inch below your bellybutton. Adjust the lower body resistance to 3-5 pounds, hand grip resistance should be little to none and begin without any elevation.

Hold onto the handlebars in front of the hip pad and start gliding one foot forward, one foot back. Use the hip pad to help you maintain your balance. When you get comfortable with the lower body motion and get a rhythm established, try letting go of one handlebar and swing your arm back and forth. Then repeat with the other arm. The next step is to keep your feet gliding and grab the cabled hand grips. Swing your arms in a back and forth motion while holding the grips.

Concentrate on keeping your hips against the pad while leaning slightly forward. Once you get the hang of the upper and lower body movement in combination, begin increasing your speed and/or resistance settings.

The 30-Minute Workout

Begin with a 5 minute warm-up gliding slowly, without resistance. Concentrate on your form and get your rhythm going. Begin to build your speed to a level that puts you into your target heart rate zone. Spend 20 minutes in your target heart rate zone while varying your speed, resistance and/or elevation level. Be sure to periodically focus on your form during the workout. The last 5 minutes are spent cooling down by gradually slowing your gliding speed and reducing resistance and elevation to a minimum. Don't stop abruptly, use this time to let your body cool off and get your heart rate down. As your heart rate begins to decrease, let go of the handgrips and hold onto the handlebars in front of the hip pad. Continue gliding while doing some slow neck rolls and gently tilting your head side to side. If you feel comfortable, let go of the handlebar with one hand and gently roll your shoulder then swing your arm back and forth. Repeat with your other arm.

Rowing Machine

Here's another terrific workout with virtually no impact on your joints that's easy to use. Many people think this machine is only good for the upper body, however that's not true. Rowing targets both the upper and lower body muscles. But don't take our word for it, hop on and find out for yourself. To get started, take a seat, grab the handle and slide the seat forward until your legs are bent a little more than 90 degrees and your arms are straight out in front of you. Now, push with your legs, and when they're almost straight, pull the handle to just below your chest level. Keep your elbows tucked close to your side and your back should have a slight natural arch. To release, straighten your arms, then bend your knees after the handle clears them and slowly glide forward to the starting position. Once you get a rhythm going you'll be able to close your eyes and visualize yourself wherever you want to be, peacefully sculling through the water.

The 30 Minute Workout

Begin with a 5 minute warm-up on a light resistance setting, rowing slowly. Concentrate on your form and get your rhythm going. Begin to build your speed and resistance to a level that puts you into your target heart rate zone. Stay in your target heart rate zone for the next 20 minutes while varying your rowing speed and resistance level. If you find you're over your target heart rate, consider rowing intervals; row for one minute, rest for one minute and so on. Gradually build up the intervals until you can row for 20 minutes straight. Periodically focus on your form during the workout to get the greatest effect. Close your eyes and transport yourself to your favorite body of water while you're rowing. The last 5 minutes are for the cool down. Gradually slow your rowing speed and reduce the resistance to a minimum. Don't stop abruptly, use this time to let your body cool off and get your heart rate down. As your heart rate begins to decrease, let go of the handle and just use your legs to slowly glide forward and back. Continue gliding while doing some slow neck and shoulder rolls.

