Is there a proper workout order routine? [1]

1) Hi Alice,

I’ve worked out in the gym for almost 10 years and I have noticed something that bothers me: Most people start their workout with their aerobics routine rather than their power routine. As far as I know, the body uses carbohydrates first, then gets to the fat only after finishing its carbohydrates, and that’s why I assumed that it is much better to start with the power routine (after a proper aerobic warm-up) and only then get to the aerobic part. Am I right? And what is the exact explanation for that?

2) Alice,

Actually, there might be a reason for doing weights first and cardio later: lifting weights needs a lot of free energy, in the form of carbohydrates. The cardio training would consume a lot of these, to the point where you would have very few reserves. So, if you do cardio first, you might not be able to lift as much weight, therefore compromising your workout. Besides, since the goal of cardio many times is to burn fat, it’s better to give a "kick in" lifting weights? burning some of your sugars? so that when moving to cardio, you start to burn fat earlier on during the exercise. Or is it?

Answer

Dear Readers,

With the variety of popular workouts these days, it’s no wonder there’s confusion about the proper regimen! There is no definite answer on whether to begin physical activity with cardiovascular (cardio) activity or weight / strength training? it can be dependent on your goals. Whether you start with cardio or strength training, the body will begin to burn calories from carbohydrates first and transfers to burning calories from fat later. Ultimately, a well-balanced physical activity plan, including both cardio and strength training, regardless of order, has benefits for overall health and fitness.

When deciding on the order of activities, whether cardio or strength is more beneficial when done first depends on your desired end result. Individuals who want to focus on building muscle may better utilize glycogen if they do strength training exercises first. Building muscle strength and mass requires high amounts of energy in a short period of time to produce enough force to break down muscle. Doing cardio before lifting weights may deplete the body, leaving less energy for strength training. Not only that, high intensity strength training can boost the body’s metabolism, leading to more fat burning during cardio exercises afterwards.
On the other hand, individuals who have specific cardio goals, such as a long-distance run, may want to do cardio first in order to focus on adapting their body to a higher intensity aerobic workout and improving their endurance. Performing strength training exercises first may not leave enough energy to then focus on the cardiovascular goals.

As for calorie burning, you were both correct in stating that the body starts burning calories from carbohydrates and then switches to fat. Carbohydrates are drawn from blood glucose or stored glycogen, while fat can be used through the breakdown of fatty acids. Generally, the body doesn't tap into stored fat as an energy source unless it needs a backup after using carbohydrates. However, because carbs average four calories of energy per gram, while fat averages about nine, it takes longer to burn fat but is more effective in weight loss. After approximately 30 minutes of moderate exercise, the body will start to burn fat rather than carbs. For example, a person who weighs 165 pound (75 kilograms) may burn approximately 286 calories when biking for 30 minutes at a moderate intensity (this increases to 430 for vigorous paces!). The number of carb calories and fat calories will differ depending on the individual, their weight, and how intensely they exercise.

Bottom line? the most efficient order of cardio and strength training is based on what you’d like to get out of physical activity. Those interested in more personalized recommendations focused on specific goals may consider talking with a certified personal trainer at a fitness center.

Here’s to sweating from, not about, your new routine!

Alice!
Category:
Nutrition & Physical Activity
Fitness
Working Out
Weight Gain & Loss

Related questions
Fat to muscle?
Does exercising on an empty stomach maximize fat burning?
Morning workout increases metabolism throughout the day?

Resources
Dodge Fitness Center (Morningside)
Bard Athletic Center (CUMC)
Published date:
Jan 05, 2018
Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/there-proper-workout-order-routine-0

Links