



The best calorie-burning exercises

Before I give you the best exercises to burn calories, you have to remember the best way to get rid of calories is NOT TO EAT THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE!!!! This may sound obvious but the calories in one large glass of wine or a Mars bar are equivalent to 20 minutes running for the average person! It is far easier to eat a little less than to burn off excess.

Getting back to the question, one of life's unfair rules is that the fitter you are, the higher your metabolic rate will be and the easier it is to burn calories. Your metabolic rate for the purposes of this article will refer to how many calories you burn at rest. The higher the rate, the more calories you are burning. If you have more muscle you will naturally have a higher metabolic rate than someone who weighs the same but has less muscle. This means that even sat down doing nothing, the person with the most muscle will burn the most calories.

Similarly the ability to push oneself harder when training comes with improved fitness and means that an elite athlete training hard for an hour may well burn twice as many calories as a beginner training for an hour. To give you an example, running burns approximately 100 calories for every mile run. A typical beginner or slower runner will run five miles in an hour and burn 500 calories, while a good runner will run ten miles and burn 1000 calories.

Therefore it is important that you find an activity that you enjoy because you want to be happy doing it for a prolonged period (more than 25 minutes) and you want to stick at it so you improve. As you improve you will be able to train harder and if you can train harder, you'll burn more calories.

Here is a comparison of the calories burnt for an average person in a few common exercises:

Exercise	Calories burnt per hour
Aerobics *	440
Cross Country skiing	560
Cycling (for exercise at 12 mph)	400
Rowing	350
Running (6 mph)	700
Swimming (non-competitive)	400
Walking	230

*Aerobics covers a variety of styles so this figure is an average across styles

As you can see running is a very effective calorie-burner, but there are a few caveats to consider. Running for a whole hour is a lot harder than cycling for the same amount of time. Running at 6mph for half an hour would burn almost as many calories as an hour of cycling, but most exercise beginners would be able to cycle non-stop for an hour sooner than they could run non-stop for half an hour. Hopefully this demonstrates why sometimes an exercise that is a less demanding may actually allow someone to burn more calories than a harder exercise that can only be sustained briefly. However a proficient runner is always likely to burn the most calories in an hour compared to proficient performers in most other aerobic activities, so it is safe to argue that running is one of the best calorie burning exercises.

Burning calories is not all about steady-paced aerobic training. Aerobic exercise will generally burn more calories whilst you are doing it, however by the time you have got your breath back and stopped sweating at the end of a session your metabolic rate will be almost back to normal. However certain activities give you an elevated metabolic rate after you finish, meaning you are burning more calories than normal for up to two hours afterwards.

Exercises that involve repetitions of very intense exercise followed by brief recoveries have been proven to raise calorie burning for sustained periods after exercise. The two commonest ways of doing this are interval training in aerobic exercises or weight training with moderate to heavy weights.

Interval training can be done with pretty much any aerobic exercise. Interval training is repeating a period of intense exercise followed by a period of gentle exercise to recover. Taking swimming as an example, an interval session would involve swimming two lengths as fast as possible, resting for 60 seconds then repeating. This would lead to good cardio-vascular fitness improvements, but significantly it would also lead to an elevated metabolic rate for some time after the actual training has finished.

Weight training by nature tends to involve periods of intense exertion (when actually lifting the weights) followed by lower exertion while recovering, before lifting more weights. This makes it like interval training. It also has the significant benefit of increasing muscle mass so, as discussed at the start, the person who performs weight training will have more muscle mass and therefore a higher metabolic rate. This is why weight training is also extremely valuable in calorie-burning and weight loss programmes.

Many women have reservations about weight training and don't want to become overly muscular. This is an understandable concern, but can be easily solved. To make significant increases in muscle gain you need to do two things - heavy overload on the muscles and testosterone. The heavy overload, caused by lifting very challenging weights, causes the muscles to break down and then build back stronger and bigger. However this cannot take place without testosterone to stimulate the muscle growth. Women have low levels of testosterone so are less likely to get muscle growth. Furthermore if the weights lifted by women are only modestly challenging rather than very challenging they will not get significant muscle growth. As a rough rule of thumb, if a weight can be lifted fifteen times or more in succession then it is not overly heavy and will encourage muscular tone and endurance, rather than bulky muscle gain.

So in summary, the best way to burn calories and promote weight loss is:

- ▶ Try not to eat too many calories in the first place!
- ▶ Use a form of exercise that you enjoy and so are more likely to stick to and improve in.

- ▶ Try interval training to burn extra calories.
- ▶ Use light weight training to increase metabolic rate and accelerate calorie burning.

You might also like to consider investing in professional help. Properly qualified Personal Trainers provide both dietary and exercise advice. As well as giving eating guidance, one of the key functions of a Personal Trainer is to push you as hard as you are able to go. Research shows that this can lead to burning between 30% and 100% more calories in a session, depending on how hard you currently push yourself. Personal Trainers will also keep modifying your training methods regularly to challenge the body in new ways and keep calorie burn high.