

# FOUR TIPS FOR WEIGHT-LOSS INTERVALS

Dr. Jamie Burr, professor of exercise physiology in the School of Kinesiology at the University of Prince Edward Island, gives the following tips for those who are overweight and want to begin interval running:

**1** Start slow and ease into it. You didn't put the weight on overnight, so don't think that you can (or should) lose it that quickly either.

**2** Don't try to do too much too soon and make sure you are being safe at all times.

**3** Seek professional help. Get screened by your doctor before starting exercise. Most High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) studies have been safe and effective because they are supervised by experts.

**4** Listen to your body. If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Discomfort during exercise is normal but pain likely means that something is wrong. Also pay attention to how you feel before and after workouts. Are you getting sick, are muscles or joints overly sore?

## How often should someone perform interval training?

Although interval training has its benefits, it's also very taxing on the body. Because high-intensity exercise is a stress on the body it can also lead to overtraining, sickness or injury if we do too much too soon. If done at a high level, HIIT training would typically be recommended one to two times per week in conjunction with other regular workouts. If done at a more moderate level, or for shorter durations, you may be able to do HIIT training more frequently.

Obese and overweight runners can experience some musculoskeletal problems, such as hip, knee or back pain. Non-weight bearing exercises such as cycling or swimming may be easier on the body for overweight exercisers as well.

**"Interval training forces you out of your comfort zone and pushes you to your maximum threshold."**

– MIKE CAIRNS


Michelle Kempton, 38, of Cow Bay, N.S. – co-founder of the Heart and Sole Running Club, where Martin is a member – has had her share of battles with weight loss. "I just know that as a person who lost weight, intervals are what worked for me," says the former software developer, who once weighed 285 pounds. "My trainer got me down to 250, but then I hit a plateau, which didn't make sense, because I had so much more to lose."

Kempton recalls the moment her trainer suggested intervals. "I was like, 'Dude, I'm 250 pounds. This isn't going to be pretty,'" she remembers. Two years later, Kempton had lost 120 pounds. "Running intervals broke my plateau," she argues, while noting that dietary changes, cutting sodium and taking other healthy steps were all part of the process.

## MORE ENERGY

Interval training also made a lasting difference for Toronto's Mike Cairns, who once weighed 230 pounds. "Interval training forces you out of your comfort zone and pushes you to your maximum threshold," he says. At 6-foot-2, Cairns is now a healthy 185 pounds. "I'd been overweight most of my life. I was never really into sports and I had poor nutrition. Combined with an inactive lifestyle, the pounds added up," says Cairns, 26. He tried dieting, but never with lasting success. He also joined a gym, but that also did very little. "You don't really know where to start. Plus, being one of the only overweight people in the gym, it's a little intimidating."

When he was 23, Cairns's sister suggested he try Running Room's Learn to Run program. The idea of getting in shape, and doing it outdoors, with those at the same fitness level convinced him to give it a shot. Cairns started with longer intervals – the reps gradually increased to 10 minutes of running and one minute of walking – and joined a 10K clinic. Since then, he's run two half-marathons and two marathons. "When I started out running, I probably couldn't run longer than 10 to 15 minutes, and now I can run about two hours without stopping," Cairns says, crediting his cardio strength built from the intervals. He's also completely overhauled his diet – his plate is mostly vegetarian. "I have a lot more energy, I can do things now that when I was younger would make me feel exhausted or frustrated," he says.

Martin can relate. "I gave myself the gift of life," she says, noting that her next big challenge will be to complete a Half Ironman in 2014. "You've got to challenge the notion of, 'I can't,'" she says. "Because you can." 

*Lindsey Craig is a Toronto-based journalist, runner and yoga enthusiast.*