

Optimal Training for Performance and Fat Loss

I've been training people for a long time. Despite all of the athletes I've worked with over the years, by far the single biggest client request has been fat loss. One of the questions I get a lot is this: "I'm trying to lose fat. How can I do that without losing strength/speed/muscle?"

I'll begin with the assumption that most of us can only train three hours per week. With time being a limiting factor, how do we maximise fat loss? Is there a hierarchy of fat loss techniques? I think so.

Be warned, no amount of training will overcome poor nutrition. You must get adequate hydration, fresh vegetables, fresh fruits, proteins and essential fats. So based on this understanding here is a look at the optimal training for performance and fat loss goals.

Five Factors for Fat Loss - Training

1. **Resistance Training** – (heavy, hard, 90-100% of max Heart Rate) - Basically resistance training is the cornerstone of any fat loss programming. Your goal is to work every muscle group hard, frequently and with an intensity that creates a massive "metabolic disturbance" or "afterburn" that leaves your metabolism elevated for up to 38 hours after your workout. (Professional coaching is advised here.)

Here's what a recent study found:

Overweight subjects were assigned to three groups: diet only, diet plus aerobic, diet plus aerobic plus weights. The diet group lost 6.6kgs of fat in 12 weeks. The diet plus aerobic group lost only half a kg more (7.08kgs). However, the diet plus aerobic plus weight training group lost 9.57kgs of fat (44 % and 35 % more than diet and aerobic only groups respectively).

2. **High Intensity Anaerobic Interval Training** – (hard, painful intervals, nasty lactic workouts, 80-90% of max HR) - The second key "ingredient" in fat loss programming is high intensity interval training (HIIT). Interval work burns more calories than steady state and elevates metabolism significantly more than other forms of cardio, particularly post-session. The downside is that it flat-out hurts! Here are the results from a study of interval training by Temblay.

This study pitted 20 weeks of endurance training against 15 weeks of interval training:

Energy cost of endurance training	= 28661 calories
Energy cost of interval training	= 13614 calories (less than half!)

HOWEVER...the results speak for themselves! The interval training group showed a nine times greater loss in fat than the endurance group. Read that again! Calorie for calorie, the interval training group lost nine times more fat overall. That means interval training is a better tool in your fat loss arsenal.

3. **High Intensity Aerobic Interval Training** – (long solid intervals with rest periods, 70-80% of max HR) - This interval work appears to "up regulate" fat burning enzymes. Basically, this means we can burn more fat in other activities as a result of its inclusion, so we get some more bang for our buck.
4. **Steady State High Intensity Aerobic Training** – (long slow constant training, you could hold a conversation, 70% of max HR) - This is just constant cardio work. You're burning calories, but you aren't working hard enough to increase metabolism significantly or to do anything beyond the session itself.

But calories do count. Burning another 300 or so calories per day will add up.

5. **Steady State Low Intensity Aerobic Training** – (snail pace, keeping up with your grandmother!) - This is just simple activity, going for a gentle walk in the park, etc. It won't burn a lot of calories. It won't increase muscle or metabolism. But it all counts when you're in fat loss mode.

Putting It All Together: Time Management

Usually fat loss recommendations start with low intensity aerobics, progress to high intensity aerobics and then intervals. Finally, when you're "in shape," they recommend resistance training. Well I say "bollocks!"

My approach to effective fat loss is from the complete opposite of the norm. If you live in the "real world", with a job and a family you can rarely afford more than 3-4 hours training per week, so, we need to look at your training in a more efficient manner and focus on your time available first, then design our programming based on that.

If you have three hours per week, use only #1 above:

Metabolic resistance training.

This can be three one-hour training sessions or four 45-minute training sessions. It doesn't seem to matter. However, once you're getting 3 hrs/wk of total body resistance training, there's really no additional effect in terms of fat loss by doing more. My guess is that, at that point, recovery starts to become a concern and intensity is impaired. This type of training involves barbell complexes, supersets, tri-sets, circuits, kettlebell combos, whole-body functional training etc.

If you have three to five hours, use #1 and # 2:

Weight training plus high intensity interval work.

High Intensity Anaerobic Interval training is like putting your savings into a high return investment account. Lower intensity aerobics is like hiding it under your mattress. Both will work, but the return you get is radically different.

If you have five to six hours available, add #3:

High Intensity Aerobic Interval Training.

Aerobic intervals win out at this point because it's still higher intensity overall than steady state work, so it burns more calories. There appears to be a fat oxidation benefit, and it will still be easier to recover from than additional anaerobic work.

If you have six to eight hours available, add #4.

Steady State High Intensity Aerobic Training

If you're not losing a lot of fat with six hours of training already, then I'd be taking a very close look at your diet. Otherwise include steady state cycling or running, the goal is to burn additional calories, while building cardiovascular fitness, without negatively impacting the intensity of your higher priority activities.

If you have more time than that, add # 5:

Get your body moving and burn up some additional calories, but don't work so hard that you inhibit recovery and negatively affect your other training.

Simply put, in the fat-loss and performance stakes, harder training works better than easier training. It really is that simple. Set your goals and implement the hierarchy I have described above, ensuring adequate nutrition and recovery, and BINGO! Good luck!