**Tips to Increase Exercise Intensity**

**What is exercise intensity:**

Exercise intensity is a subjective measure of how hard an exercise or exercise session feels while you are performing it. This can also be referred to as your perceived exertion. Your perceived exertion may feel different from someone else doing the same exercise funder the same conditions.

**What are the benefits of high intensity exercise or Hiit?**

High intensity exercise can increase muscle activity and heart rate and contribute to healthy weight management. Shorts bouts of challenging exercise may also provide meaningful benefits such as helping to reduce insulin resistance, improving cardiovascular health, reducing blood pressure, and improving cholesterol levels.

**Special considerations for safety prior to increasing exercise intensity:**

* Proper execution and form of each exercise is paramount. Do not progress or attempt to increase the intensity if you have not mastered the skill. Improper form and execution can increase risk of injury.
* Always do an appropriate warm up to ensure your body is prepared for an increased intensity.
* Always do an appropriate cool down to ensure your heart rate returns to normal levels and to avoid blood pooling.
* When doing strengthening exercises, the order of the exercises is important to follow to allow one muscle group to rest or recover while another is working.
* Rest phases – Wherever you see rest phase, think ACTIVE REST. In other words, don’t stop moving completely. Simply lower your activity level. This can be walking slowly, getting a drink of water or performing very gentle stretches. You want to keep your body warm and pliable through light movement.

**How to increase exercise intensity:**

**Frequency**

* For some, just adding additional exercise sessions per week increases the intensity. If you exercise 3 days per week, aim for 4 to 5. If you currently are not exercising, begin with a 15–20-minute session.

**Intensity**

* Add short bouts of intervals, anywhere from 5 seconds to 8 minutes in length. Generally, the shorter the work period, the harder the work should be and the longer the rest period.
* Vary the interval lengths and rest periods. For example, during one exercise session, incorporate 10 sets of 30 second intervals each with a 2-minute rest phase. Based on the BSDI scale of 1-7, these should be at a level 7. On another day, incorporate 4-6 sets of 4-minute intervals each with a 3-minute rest phase. Based on the BSDI scale, these should be at a level 5.5-6.
* Intervals can also be in the form of adding hills to your walk, run, or bike, or adding speed work through short bursts or increasing your overall miles per hour. If you always walk or run, seek out a bank of steps during your walk/run, or in place of your walk/run. Hitting the steps is one of the best exercises to increase your cardiovascular fitness.
* Try adding a cardiovascular interval in between sets of strength training. For example, perform 3 sets of pushups, then run or walk at a high intensity (on the BSDI scale a 5-6) for 2 minutes. Rest and repeat in between strength exercises.
* Adding intervals to your exercise sessions is one of the most effective ways to improve your overall cardiovascular health.

**Time**

* Increase your overall exercise time. If you are accustomed to exercising for 30 minutes, increase your total time to 40 minutes. Increase your time slowly to allow your body time to adapt to the increased demand.

**Type**

* Vary the type of exercise you do. Change it up! If you are accustomed to running, try swimming. After every exercise session, your body adapts and recovers to perform that same exercise again. Changing the type of exercise forces your body to use other muscle groups as primary movers and provides variability. Essentially you catch your body off-guard from the normal routine and your body must adapt during recovery. This is a great way to increase the training stimulus your body receives.
* If you are accustomed to strength training with weights, try a bodyweight workout and perform the movements in circuits, resting after circuit, for a total of 3-5 circuits. This might look like: upper body exercise > lower body exercise> core exercise >rest period.

**References**

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