



Exercise for Fat Loss

David Fiech, MS, CSCS

Most fitness minded people place fat loss and improved body composition on top of their priority list when they begin an exercise program. Many athletes are also interested in improving body composition as this may have a positive impact on performance. Unfortunately, the majority of people who start out with good intentions ultimately fail at achieving the results they are after.

This not only holds true for people who have attempted body composition changes on their own, but also for those who have sought out the help of the fitness industry. A major reason behind this lack of success is simply a lack of understanding when it comes to the science of fat loss. An exercise program focusing on fat loss is actually a new concept and wasn't needed in the past. The purpose of an exercise program twenty years ago was to enhance an already active lifestyle, but today we live in an almost completely automated time-crunched society that has established the need to develop exercise programs specifically to induce fat loss. Although many different factors are critical for body composition improvements, I want to focus on a common misconception in fat loss programs and a powerful combination of two training methods that will guarantee results.

Aerobic Exercise is Not an Effective Method for Fat Loss

To clarify, I am referring to continuous steady state exercise such as jogging or biking at a consistent pace for a certain amount of time. Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against steady state aerobic exercise for improved health and well being, but it is not an effective means for improving body composition. Many fitness enthusiasts and professionals alike have promoted aerobic exercise for fat loss based on how much fat is burned during the aerobic training session. The problem is with the actual exercise session which only makes up a small part of the big picture that is your life. Aerobic training definitely burns calories with a major contribution coming from fat. However, basing a fat loss program on this is much too short sighted. The key to fat loss is an increase in metabolism leading to increased fat utilization for energy throughout the entire day and not just while you are working out. Multiple studies and medically based research have revealed the following key factors:

- Your body will adapt to aerobic exercise and burn less calories while repeating similar exercise sessions over time
- Resting metabolism will also be lowered over time thus negating the effects of the caloric burn from the workout
- Consistent aerobic exercise can decrease muscle which plays a critical role in elevating metabolism
- One recent study evaluated the long term effects of people performing high mileage running distances over time; results indicate that even those who ran more than 40 miles per week year after year had a net gain in weight through an increase in body fat and a decrease in muscle mass related to the previous three factors

Based on the research, putting yourself through hours of aerobic exercise will do your body more harm than good when it comes to improving body composition. This explains why some people perform hour after hour of exercise and seem to accomplish nothing when it comes to losing fat. This scenario would cause almost anybody to become frustrated and discontinue exercise all together. The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way. In part II I will discuss the two highly effective components of a fat loss program that will guarantee success.

Reference: Cosgrove, A. Science of Fat Loss. Cosgrove Results Fitness Training: 2008. p 44-52.