

Which Comes First: Cardio or Weights?

Most people have their workout routine set: they come in, do their cardio, and then head to the weights. Or, they'll pump iron first, and then go for a jog on the treadmill. But are they doing them in the proper order? Which should you do first? Many magazine articles and people will tell you different stories, so what do you believe?

Honestly, there is no physiological difference between doing cardio or weights first, provided your energy level remains constant throughout (which it won't...). In an ideal world, you would do your cardio workout and your lifting workout at different times during the day: do cardio in the morning, and lift weights in the evening, or vice versa. This allows for your energy to build back up for your second workout. However, who has the time to workout twice a day? You'd have to quit your job, or say goodbye to your family. So, back to square one...what do you do first? Well, that all depends on what your goals are.

If your goal is to lose weight, then it makes sense to do your cardio first. Cardiovascular exercise is where you're going to burn the most calories, so you need to have enough energy to get through your workout. If you tire yourself out too early by doing weights first, by the time you hit the treadmill, you're already fatigued. You're not going to be able to give 100%, thus cheating yourself out of a bigger calorie burn, which will translate into fewer pounds lost. However, it's important that you don't neglect your strength training. Resistance training helps increase muscle mass, which in turn will boost your metabolism. A pound of muscle burns about three times more calories than a pound of fat. A pound of muscle burns about six calories, as opposed to two calories per pound of fat. So increasing muscle mass is important, even if you're looking to shed a few pounds.

If your goal is to tone up, or get stronger, then you'd want to start out with strength training. If you're already tired from putting in 30 minutes on the Stairmaster, then you're not going to be able to lift as much weight, or perform as many repetitions. Starting with your strength training allows for you to give your all to the workout. Do the cardio at the end of your workout, but don't forget to warm up with just a few minutes of light cardio and stretching prior to your resistance workout, to help prevent muscle injury and get the body ready for work.

So, if you're just trying to stay healthy, which should you do first? In a case like this, it doesn't matter which you do first. If you're just trying to maintain your health, I suggest switching it up. On some days, do your cardio first. On others, start off with strength training. That way, you get the best of both worlds, just on different days.

On a side note, if you are trying to lower your blood pressure, studies have shown that doing a cardiovascular exercise following a strength-training workout over a period of several months can lead to a decrease in blood pressure.

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends 20 to 60 minutes of cardiovascular exercise, three to five days a week. The ACSM also suggests a strength training program, consisting of eight to 10 exercises, done two to three days a week.