



MARCH FITNESS ARTICLE OF THE MONTH

By Robin Weiss

The FAT-BURNING ZONE is a MYTH

The argument behind the myth that low-intensity ("fat-burning") workouts maximize fat burning is that low-intensity aerobic training allows your body to use more fat (in relation to glucose and glycogen) as its energy source. This, supposedly, accelerates the loss of body fat.

It is true that a higher proportion of the calories burned during low-intensity exercise come from fat (about 60% as opposed to approximately 35% from high-intensity workouts). However, high-intensity aerobic exercise (a pace you can maintain for more than a few minutes) burns more calories from fat in the final analysis.

Example: Depending on your size and fitness level, you could burn approximately 200 calories if you perform 30 minutes of low-intensity aerobic exercise. About 120 of those calories (60%) will come from fat. If you exercise for the same amount of time at a higher intensity, you'll burn approximately 400 calories. About 140 of the calories you burned (35%) will have come from stored fat.

For weight loss, weight maintenance, and overall health, you're better off exercising in a higher intensity aerobic zone as much as you can, because exercising at this intensity burns more total calories. The "fat-burning zone" is misleading. You will burn a higher percentage of fat in relation to glucose when you work at a lower intensity, but you will also burn *fewer total calories and less total fat*. As a bonus, high-intensity aerobic exercise strengthens your heart and cardiovascular system, lowers blood pressure, and improves cholesterol levels.

Although more vigorous exercise burns more total and more fat calories, the less intense form of exercise has its benefits as well. For example, because many overweight or deconditioned people find that lower-intensity exercise is more comfortable, they may be willing to engage in these workouts more often.

Points to remember:

1. Low-intensity workouts **do** promote weight and fat loss. **You just have to do them for a longer period of time.**
2. Low-intensity aerobic exercise is not a better or more effective way to lose body fat (or weight) than more intense physical activity - **the "fat-burning zone" is a myth.**
3. The relative percentage of fat burned has nothing to do with weight loss—it's the total amount of calories burned that counts. So just ignore the cardio machine panels and **push the aerobic intensity** of your exercise sessions.
4. You lose weight and body fat when you **expend more calories than you consume**, not because you burn fat (or anything else) when you exercise.

Reference: Bryant, Cedric X. 101 Frequently Asked Questions about "Health & Fitness" and "Nutrition & Weight Control". Sagamore Publishing, 1999.