

TIP: How Accurate Is My Cardio Machine's Calorie Counter?

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"The treadmill said I burned 500 calories in my 50 min. workout. Is that true?" Probably not! Although the accuracy of calorie counters has improved, they are still only estimates of our energy expenditure. There are too many factors at work to accurately calculate the calorie burn for every potential user. In general, newer and more expensive cardio machines provide the most accurate calorie counts. Also, the more information the machine requires of the user, the more accurate the estimate will be. Here is a list of complicating factors that cardio machines cannot address:

- Muscle burns more calories per minute than fat. Without an accurate body fat percentage, an accurate caloric expenditure is not possible.
- Men burn calories faster than women. If the machine does not account for gender, the caloric burn reading will be inaccurate.
- As we age, our basal metabolic rate slows down. How much it slows down depends on the individual. A cardio machine simply can't have this information for every user.
- Fitness levels can vary greatly between people of the same height, weight, gender, and age. It is impossible for a cardio machine to account for the athletic efficiency and/or biochemistry of every user.
- Factors such as dehydration and illness can alter our ability to burn calories at any given time. Even the best formula, with detailed information about the user, cannot accurately calculate the rate at which calories are being burned during a specific activity.

Given their inaccuracy, should we use these calorie counters? Yes! Goals need parameters by which to measure progress and define success. Calorie counts can help us track and guide improvement. For example, if the treadmill says that you burned x cal. walking with 0 incline at x mph for x mins., try raising the incline and see what you burn. You may find that even small changes in your workouts will help you work harder and achieve your goals faster.

What we eat is just as important as what we do when it comes to our health. If weight loss is your goal, you'll need to establish a balance between calories in and calories out. Calorie counters can help with this as well as help establish a reasonable expected weight loss rate. So. even with the

inaccuracy issues, cardio machine calorie counters have a valid use. Just remember the key elements of moderation and estimation -- you can't have that Starbucks Latte based solely on your cardio workout during which you supposedly burned enough calories to earn it! Estimation is the best we can get from calorie counters.

Reference: scwfitness.com 2009