Target your Heart Rate

Most people believe the harder they work out the more fat they burn. Most people are wrong.

The truth is fat burning occurs at a much lower intensity than many of us realize. Which means, even though you’re sweating it out in the gym, you might actually be missing an opportunity to lose fat. Luckily, it’s fairly easy to find the sweet spot where your body begins to burn fat during your workout—instead of the snack you just had! Here’s how:

Step 1: Find Your Fat-Burning Zone There is a perfect heart rate zone tailored to each individual that burns the most fat calories. Stay below this zone and you aren’t maximizing the fat burn. Go above this zone and you’re only burning the food in your stomach, not getting rid of the body fat. And you might be surprised to learn the intensity level is fairly low, and you should aim to workout slightly longer at that lower intensity.

Here are three easy ways to calculate your fat-burning zone:

Figure out your max heart rate (Max Heart Rate = 220 – your age). And then determine your fat-burning range, which is 60% to 70% of your max heart rate.

Use a fitness app, like Wahoo Fitness, MapMyFitness, or RunKeeper, to calculate your 5 heart rate zones.

Do a Field Test or Home Test with the Wahoo Fitness app, which will identify your Burn and Burst Zones.

Step 2: Burn Fat, Not Just Calories You may have noticed that when you workout harder, the number of calories you expend creeps up. Making it easy to assume the higher the intensity the more weight they can lose. But, sadly, not all calories are equal—especially when it comes to fat loss! Getting your heart rate closer to your max heart rate might show more calories being burned, but you’re not necessarily burning fat.
In fact, when you hit higher level of intensity your body is most likely burning off the short-term stores of sugar and carbohydrates you took in during your last meal. (This explains why you’re so hungry after an intense workout!) To really target the long-term savings bank where your body stores fat, you need to opt for lower intensity activities that keep your heart rate in the fat-burning zone for longer.

Step 3: Choose the Right Workout Choosing a workout and intensity level to reach your fat burning zone will depend on your fitness level. If you are an avid runner, for example, you’ll need to run faster to reach your fat burning zone than someone just getting into running. Here are a few ideas for every fitness level.

FOR BEGINNERS Many everyday activities offer low heart rate, fat-burning opportunities. Some good ones:

Park at the back of the parking lot and walk to the entrance
Walk the dog instead of simply tossing him a ball
Ditch your car and walk or ride your bike to lunch instead of driving
When there are stairs, take them!

FOR RUNNERS Long, slow distance runs will keep you in the fat-burning zone for your entire workout. A few things to keep in mind:

Slow is the key word here. Keep your pace moderate enough to remain in your target heart-rate zone (60% to 70% of your max heart rate)
Consider doing a brisk walk at first—especially if you’re new to running. As your fitness level builds, you’ll be able to trade in your walk for a steady jog, without coming out of the fat-burning zone.
Aim to complete a long, slow distance run 3 to 5 times per week.
Don’t increase your weekly total mileage by more 10% each week. You run the risk of an over-use injury when packing on too many miles.