

Heart Rate Monitors

Heart rate monitors can be used as exercise aids, motivational tools, trendy accessories, data analysers and safety equipment. Does that mean that you should rush out and buy one?

Most of us find it difficult to maintain the same level of motivation 365 days a year, every year especially as the benefits of exercise are not immediate. A heart rate monitor can help you to maintain your motivation by quantifying your exercise sessions in terms of calories burned, session duration and average heart rate. This feed back acts as a pat on the back and drives you to carry on.

Heart rate monitors can be used as your very own personal trainer, aiding you on your journey towards your health and fitness target.

What Do Heart Rate Monitors Do?

The main function of a heart rate monitor is to tell you your heart rate as you exercise. Well, that's what they used to do... these days they practically do your work out for you. That's a slight exaggeration but most heart rate monitors have the following features and data:

- heart rate
- length of work out
- calories burned
- accumulative calories burned over a number of exercise sessions
- max and min heart rate during session
- percentage of maximum heart rate
- average heart rate during exercise session
- ideal exercise heart rate range for you age and sex
- computer connectivity
- they look good too
- time and date!

There are many more features but these are the ones that are to be of the most use. If you are a real pro you might want to investigate the sports specific heart rate monitors with their associated accessories.

How Do Heart Rate Monitors Work?

Most heart rate monitors come with a chest strap and watch. The chest strap fastens around your chest and has 2 sensors, one against each side of your chest. The chest strap senses your heart rate and transmits a signal using wireless technology to the watch. The watch displays your heart rate in beats per minute. Your heart rate is then used in conjunction with your personal details to calculate further information i.e. your maximum heart rate and how many calories you have burned.

Heart rate monitors are available without chest straps, but your pulse is only recorded and displayed on demand when your fingers are in contact with sensors on the watch. A chest strap in comparison monitors your heart rate throughout your exercise session and records more accurate information.

Many heart rate monitors are designed to be compatible with the most popular ranges of gym equipment. For example, when you wear your chest strap your pulse and calorie expenditure is shown on the treadmill display.

Why Use a Heart Rate Monitor?

- Why do you need to know how fast your heart is beating when you can already feel it trying to burst out of your chest?
- What does all of this extra information add to an exercise session?
- Why bother?

One of the main benefits of exercising with a heart rate monitor is that you can ensure that you are exercising efficiently. When we work hard we want and deserve the best results.

Get Fit

Once you have input your age and sex, your heart rate monitor will tell you how hard your heart is working in beats per minute and as a percentage of your maximum heart rate. The purpose of this information is to ensure that you are exercising within the correct heart rate range.

We all lose our motivation from time to time and lose faith in the effectiveness of exercise. The use of a heart rate monitor will increase your confidence in your workouts. When you know that you are exercising correctly it is easier to motivate yourself to carry on towards your goals.

A fit and healthy person should be working their heart between 65% and 85% of their maximum heart rate in order to increase their overall level of fitness. Remember that everyone is different and you should increase the intensity of exercise gently over time.

Lose Weight

Exercise is a great way to lose weight, but it is a tough slog; that is why it is necessary to make every second of your work-out count. A heart rate monitor helps you to ensure that you are working at the correct intensity to burn the most calories.

Improve Cardiovascular Fitness (increased lung capacity and stamina)

Heart rate monitors can help you to improve your aerobic fitness.

As a general guideline, in order to most efficiently exercise your heart and lungs and to improve your stamina you should be aiming to exercise at 75% to 85% of your maximum heart rate. As you get fitter your heart and lungs will circulate oxygen more efficiently and therefore require less of it. As a result your heart rate will reduce and your recovery rates will decrease. The recovery rate is the time that it takes for your pulse to return to its resting rate.

Exercise Safely

Heart rate monitors are ideal if your doctor or fitness professional has recommended a specific heart rate range owing to illness.

Exercise is often prescribed to facilitate weight loss and to improve cardiovascular fitness, both of which will reduce stress on the heart. However, exercising too vigorously can put further stress on the heart; heart rate monitors enable you to exercise confidently within the prescribed heart rate range.

(Heart rate monitors should not be used by people who have pace makers).

Stay Motivated

Keep yourself motivated by using a heart rate monitor to check your progress.

Try the following 'motivational mind games':

Set yourself a target of burning 10% more calories each week i.e.

- Week 1: 500 cals
- Week 2: 500 + 50 = 550
- Week 3: 550 + 55 = 605

Remember to log your calorific expenditure in your Weight Loss Resources Exercise Diary.

Try interval training. Exercise for 1 minute at 85% of your maximum heart rate and then reduce the intensity of the exercise until your heart rate reduces to 65% of your maximum heart rate; repeat for 15 minutes initially and increase the duration of exercise by 2 minutes every week up to 30 minutes per session.

Walk for 15 minutes at 75% of your maximum heart rate. Repeat the same 15 minute walk twice a week, every week at 75% of your maximum heart rate. The distance of your walk will increase as your heart becomes more effective at its job and you are able to walk faster.

Which Heart Rate Monitor Should I Get?

Consider the following:

Functionality

Ensure that your heart rate monitor is capable of the following functions:

- Continuous heart rate monitoring - to ensure that you get the best results.
- Continuous calorie counter - very useful for weight loss in conjunction with the Weight Loss Resources food/exercise diary.
- Timer - to monitor session duration. It is important that you are able to see the seconds ticking by. If you are challenging yourself (which you should be for optimum results) you will be motivated by the thought of completing your session and the smug feeling that will follow.
- Time and date.

Aesthetics

We all want to look good, don't we? You can buy heart rate monitors in a variety of colours, shapes and sizes in ranges designed for both men and women.

Cost

Heart rate monitors range from approximately \$80 to \$800. You don't need to break the bank to get all of the best features. If you want all of the functions listed above you'll need to spend about \$80.