What is Cardiovascular training?

Cardiovascular training is an important component of a health regimen. Ideally, it should be performed at least three times a week, for a minimum of 30 minutes each time. Some popular cardiovascular training exercises are power walking, running, swimming, biking, hiking, aerobic dance, and step. Using more than one type of cardiovascular exercise, a practice called cross-training, can be even more effective than using just one.

If cardiovascular training is used to burn fat, the target heart rate is typically 60% to 70% of the maximum heart rate. Beginners can start at a lower target heart rate, around 50% of the maximum. When using a target heart rate of 50% to 70% of the maximum heart rate, about 85% of the calories burned will come from fat. If your goals instead are to maximize the performance of your cardiovascular and respiratory system, thereby building your endurance, maintain a heart rate of 70% to 80% of your maximum heart rate. Performing cardiovascular training at this level can increase the size and strength of one's heart.

To determine your ideal heart rate for cardiovascular training, first determine your resting heart rate. This is best done in the morning, when the body is as close as possible to a resting state. Find your pulse on the throat, or the inside of the wrist, by pressing lightly with the index and middle finger. Do not use the thumb, as the thumb also has a pulse. Using a watch with a second hand, count the number of heart beats in ten seconds, then multiply by six. For maximum accuracy, repeat this process for three consecutive mornings and average the result for the resting heart rate.

To find your maximum heart rate, subtract your age from 220. Next, subtract the resting heart rate from the maximum heart rate to determine your heart rate reserve. Depending upon your goals, determine the range of your target heart rate. Multiply the heart rate reserve by the maximum and minimum levels of your target heart rate -- say 60% and 70% -- then add your resting heart rate to each number to find the maximum and minimum beats per minute of your target heart range.

Since it is important to maintain a certain heart rate for cardiovascular training, neither falling short nor exceeding it, it is important to monitor one's heart rate during exercise. Many cardio machines allow the user to constantly measure his or her heart rate with a heart rate monitor or just by gripping the handles on the equipment. There are also wristbands that serve this purpose. Alternatively, one can use a clock with a second hand or a stopwatch and take ones pulse at regular intervals to determine whether one is in the target heart rate zone while exercising.