



CARDIO FOR FAT LOSS GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Whether you're trying to lose 50 pounds of fat, or the last few stubborn pounds, it's likely that you've considered doing some cardio to make it happen.

Cardio, along with many other things in the health and fitness space, has received both praise and criticism when it comes to losing fat and keeping it off for the rest of your life. My hope is that this guide will give you some insight on how exactly fat loss works, how cardio can play a role, and how you can implement it into your program, if you so please.

HOW FAT LOSS WORKS

Though losing fat may not be the easiest thing in the world, the concept itself is quite simple. Learning the principles of fat loss in their simplest form will give you a foundation that you can lose fat from, whether you implement lots of cardio, or none at all.

When your body is in positive energy balance (more energy coming in than going out), your body stores energy. When your body is in negative energy balance (more energy going out than in), your body loses stored energy.

Stored energy can be in the form of fat mass and/or lean body mass. For the sake of this guide we are only going to focus on the energy that is stored as fat mass.

A calorie is a unit of energy. This is what we use to describe the amount of energy that is in food. So, if there are more calories coming in than there are coming out, we are in a positive energy balance, or in other words, a calorie surplus. If there are more calories going out than in, we are in a negative energy balance, or in other word, a calorie deficit.

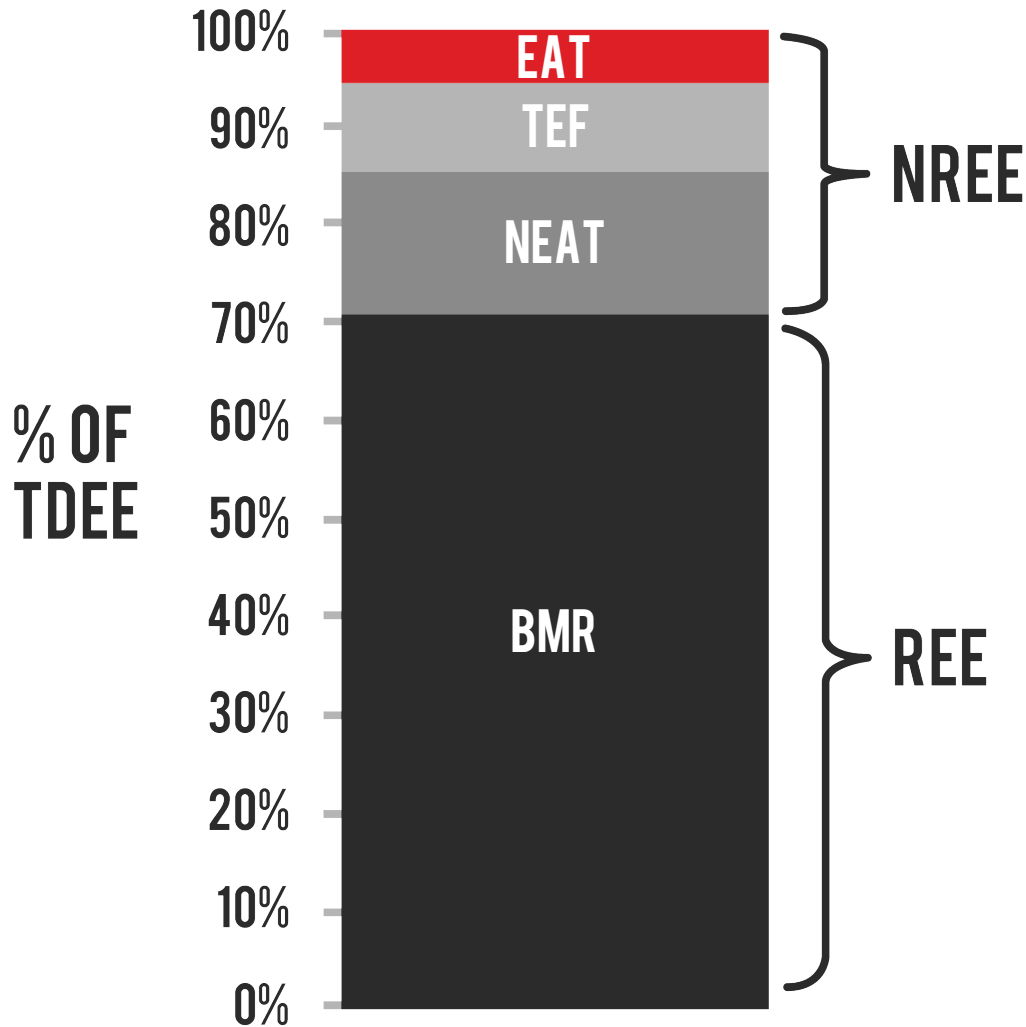
So, if we are consuming more calories than we are burning, we can gain fat. If we are consuming fewer calories than we are burning, we can lose fat. This is the foundation that must be understood before moving on.

HOW ENERGY IS BURNED

The total amount of calories that we burn is called total daily energy expenditure, or TDEE. Your TDEE is made up of a few different components:

- Basal Metabolic Rate (BMR)
- Non Exercise Activity Thermogenesis (NEAT)
- Exercise Activity Thermogenesis (EAT)
- Thermal Effect of Food (TEF)

Here is a chart to help you get a visual:



Original photo belongs to researchgate.net

Your BMR makes up a large majority of the calories you burn throughout the day. This is your metabolism, what your body burns at rest.

Your NEAT is the next portion. NEAT is considered movement or activity that isn't really considered formal exercise. Fidgeting, typing, and things like that fall into this category.

Your TEF makes up the amount of calories that you burn while breaking down and digesting food. The higher quality of the food and the more food you eat, the higher your TEF is.

Your EAT is the smallest portion of your total calories burned. This one surprises a lot of people. This would be the calories that are burned during your workouts. As you can see, it's not that much compared to other categories in your total energy expenditure.

Understanding how little your workouts contribute to your total daily energy expenditure is key, and you'll see why here in a moment.

EXERCISE'S SMALL ROLE IN ENERGY EXPENDITURE

One of the biggest reasons people have a hard time losing fat is because they think they're burning 500-1,000 calories in every single workout. Though this is most certainly possible, it's not likely, especially on a regular basis.

The fact of the matter is that formal exercise makes up a very small portion of your total energy expenditure. For example, 11 flights of stairs burns an average of 20 calories. I don't know about you, but if I walked 11 flights of stairs, I would feel like I at least burned a couple hundred.

Because of this misconception, many people's default when it comes to fat loss is to get on their cardio machine of choice and do hours and hours of cardio every single week. This isn't a problem, or the inherently wrong way to go about it, but it's certainly one of the most inefficient ways to go about it.

Why? Simply because it is far easier to consume calories than it is to burn them. We all know this is true. We don't need research to show us that eating 240 calories worth of Reese's is way easier than burning 240 calories. But, we have the research anyway. It's been shown that only changing one's diet to consume fewer calories and not exercising more leads to improved fat loss than leaving one's diet the same and exercising more.

Because of this, it's not the best idea to add more and more cardio to your routine if your goal is to lose fat, transform your body, and maintain it long term. But, you may be thinking, "What if I add more and more cardio to my routine AND change my nutrition? Won't that be the best solution possible?" To that I would say no, for a few reasons.

RESISTANCE TRAINING, TRANSFORMING YOUR BODY, AND BMR

If there was any form of exercise to add more of, it would be resistance training. Resistance training's energy expenditure is a little lower than cardio but not by much. And, it has other benefits that cardio does not.

TRANSFORMING YOUR BODY

As you may know, you cannot spot reduce body fat, unless you have some sort of surgery done. Your body will lose fat wherever it wants to. However, you can use resistance training to build up and shape certain parts of your body over others. Want to build better arms? Simply apply more arm work in your resistance training program. Want to build a booty? Simply add more glute work to your routine. One of the biggest pros of resistance training is that you can use it to shape and sculpt your body however you want, just like a sculptor would use their chisel to shape their sculpture however they want.

IMPROVING YOUR BMR

With proper resistance training and nutrition, you can increase the amount of muscle you have. Increases in muscle can improve your BMR. And if you didn't notice, your BMR makes up a large majority of the calories you burn throughout your day. I don't know about you, but I would much rather use my hard work with formal exercise to improve my BMR and shape my body than I would to hop on a treadmill and work for an hour just to burn off those Reese's peanut butter cups I ate (If you haven't been able to figure it out yet, I'm a big Reese's guy).

There is debate as to how much increased muscle can actually improve your BMR, with some research showing that it only adds 4-10 calories burned per pound of muscle gained, which is next to nothing. But in my opinion, this is a very narrow way of looking at it. With more muscle, your body requires more energy at rest. With more muscle, your body uses more energy to move around. With more muscle, you will have more strength, which leads to you lifting heavier weights in the gym, which leads to more energy used.

Having more muscle, whether 2 pounds or 30 pounds, has quite the ripple effect on your energy expenditure.

THE INTERFERENCE EFFECT

When we exercise, we are giving our body a specific stimulus that is demanding it to adapt. The stimuli that resistance training and cardio give the body are two entirely different and opposing things.

Think of it like a tug of war. The more cardio you do, the more your body adapts in one direction. The more resistance training you do, the more your body adapts in another direction. In short, doing lots of cardio with resistance training can greatly reduce the positive effects of resistance training, which we want lots of if we're trying to transform our body.

One of the things that has a big impact on the interference effect is duration. Generally, the greater the duration of the cardio, the greater the interference effect. I generally recommend no more than 20 minutes of cardio per session. If you want to do more, it's best to break it up (more on that in a sec).

So, does this mean that cardio is a complete waste of time, and should never be done when trying to lose body fat? No, absolutely not. It just means that we need to be strategic about how we use it, that way we don't reduce the positive effects of resistance training, which should make up the large majority of the formal exercise we do.

HOW TO USE CARDIO FOR FAT LOSS

If you're wanting to use cardio in your programming, here is how I recommend programming it in. But before I go on, it's important to know that I recommend that your cardio doesn't outweigh your resistance training in the context of losing fat and shaping your body. It's always ideal in this context to be lifting more than you are doing cardio.

The following are in order from the most favorable strategy, to the least favorable strategy:

STRATEGY #1: OFF DAYS

The best thing you can do is to have your cardio sessions be as far away from your resistance training sessions as possible. If your resistance training sessions are on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, you could do your cardio sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

STRATEGY #2: SAME DAY, FAR APART

If strategy #1 is not an option for you, the next best thing you can do is to have your cardio session be as far apart from your resistance training sessions as possible, if on the same day. So this would mean that you are doing cardio in the morning, and resistance training at least 6 hours later.

STRATEGY #3: SPRINKLES

If the only time you can do your cardio is when you're at the gym for your resistance training session, break up your cardio and sprinkle it around your workout. If you were going to do 20 minutes for your cardio session, you could do 10 minutes before resistance training and 10 minutes afterward.

STRATEGY #4: AFTERWARD

If none of these seem realistic for you, and you can't find any other way to incorporate your cardio throughout your week, the best thing you can do is to do the cardio training right after your resistance training session. This is the least ideal, but if it's all you can do, it's all you can do.

Using these strategies will help you reduce the interference effect, helping you get the most out of your resistance training sessions.

WHAT TYPE OF CARDIO?

If you've come to the conclusion that you do indeed want to do cardio as a part of your fat loss process, it's important to discuss what type of cardio will help you best. Remember, we don't want our cardio getting in the way of the benefits of our resistance training, so we need to discuss what method will help us do that.

LOW INTENSITY OR HIGH INTENSITY?

Low intensity steady state cardio (LISS) is going to be our best option. It has a greater potential for energy expenditure, it's easier to recover from, it's easier to maintain long term, and it can minimize the interference effect.

MODALITY

We also want to make sure that we are causing as little muscle damage as possible during these cardio sessions, and reducing injury risk. If we are super sore from cardio due to increased muscle damage, our resistance training sessions are going to suck. If we are injured from cardio, we aren't going to be able to do our resistance training, and that will suck, too.

So, we want to use forms of cardio that are easiest on the body. Cycling, stair stepping, and incline walking are great options with those things in mind.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Ultimately choosing whether or not to do cardio (in the context of fat loss) comes down to the risk-reward ratio of eating less. We would want to use cardio if hunger is increasing drastically and there aren't any more nutritional adjustments we can make to reduce it, or nutrient deficiencies are at risk, which would certainly keep us from reducing calorie intake further.

As you explore the possibility of cardio in your routine to help you lose fat, keep the following in mind:

- Cardio is not needed to lose fat. If you feel that you need cardio to make fat loss happen, there's a high chance that something is off with your nutrition, calculations, programming, progress tracking, or all of the above. My clients make crazy transformations, most of them without using cardio. Here are some examples:

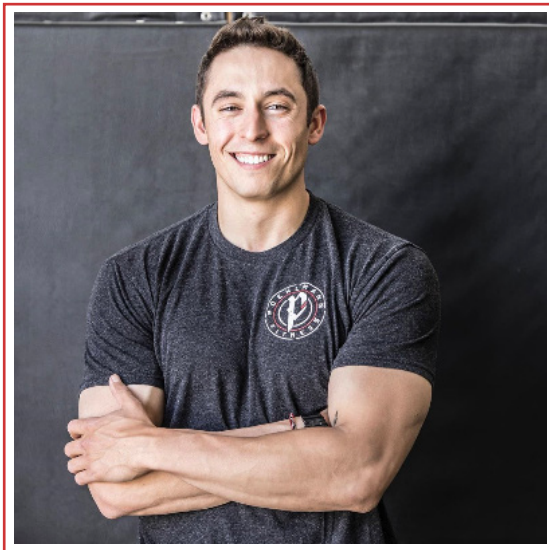
www.poehlmannfitness.com/success-stories

- It is generally best to adjust your nutrition, and focus on resistance training to lose fat than it is to keep your nutrition the same and add more cardio.

- Use as little cardio as possible to achieve your desired energy deficit.

If you do use cardio, use the strategies from this guide to program it into your routine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Adam Poehlmann is a fitness and nutrition coach based in Fort Worth, TX. After hanging up the baseball cleats, he found a strong interest in the human body and how it performs. Since then, Adam has been transforming lives through fitness and nutrition in a fun and encouraging atmosphere. You can find more information about Adam [here](#).

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