

# Get Heart Smart

## Using heart rate training zones in your workouts

Building a stronger heart is the best life insurance there is. And the best way to get a stronger heart is to give it a good workout by taking regular cardiovascular exercise. Either at home on your bike, stepper or treadmill, or down at the gym.

However, before you jump on the nearest bike and go at it hell for leather, it's best to know what sort of intensity you should be working at. It's handy to work out your maximum heart rate and your ideal training zone.

Assuming that you're not injured and/or sick, your ideal training zone is dependent on two main factors: your age and your fitness level.

Training zones are usually represented as a percentage of your maximum heart rate (MHR). Therefore, the first thing you should do is calculate your MHR. This can either involve you taking a 'stress test' whereby you push your body to its absolute limit and take a reading. Or a more sedate calculation that will barely raise your pulse above its resting rate.

The first method is more accurate, but for most people (especially beginners) simply taking your age from 220 will suffice. I.e. if you're 34 years old, your theoretical MHR will be  $220 - 34 = 186$  bpm.

Once you have this figure, you can calculate the 'zones':

Type of Exerciser	Ideal Training Zone
Beginner/Novice	65-75% MHR
Intermediate	70-85% MHR
Expert/Elite	75-85% MHR



Taking the same 34-year old example from above. If he/she is an intermediate exerciser, they should be aiming to keep their heart rate between 130 and 158 bpm for the duration of their cardio training sessions.

### Measuring Heart Rate – Chest Straps vs Contact HR

On commercial grade cardio equipment, contact HR can give a reasonable 'estimate' of your working heart rate. That being said, a chest strap is much more preferable, because: a) they're more accurate, and b) they update the information to the program a lot quicker than contact HR.

Another point worth mentioning, specific to treadmills – how many of you are comfortable running at reasonable pace holding onto a contact rail to record your HR data? Not many, I presume.

On home fitness grade equipment, contact HR tends to be very inaccurate indeed. Some experts go as far as saying that it's just a 'cheap gimmick'. Retailers may tell you "something has got to be better than nothing". However, when that 'something' doesn't work accurately, you have to question its worth.

You can purchase HR chest straps without the accompanying watch receiver. They can connect with most commercial grade gym equipment and existing smart watches or fitness trackers. Alternatively you can spend a bit more and buy a kit with chest strap and monitor watch included.