

5 benefits of HIIT that will have you looking forward to your next workout

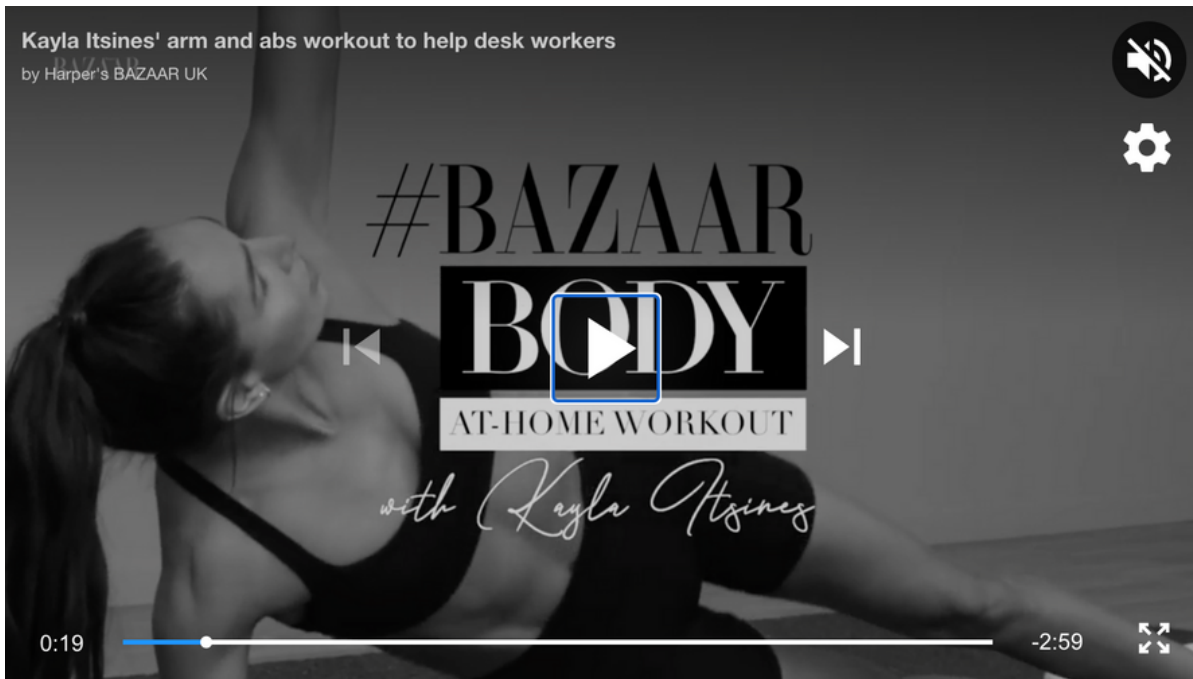
Plus, tips for getting the most of your interval training session and four expert moves to try

BY [JULIA SULLIVAN, CPT](#) / 15 DEC 2021



Regular aerobic exercise has been shown to boost heart health, keep blood sugar levels in check, and maintain the health of our minds for the long haul. But just as there are a multitude of ways to work out and keep your body (and mind) healthy and strong, there are a trove of different approaches you can take to doing cardio. Enter: HIIT, or high-intensity interval training.

HIIT's definition is a heckuva lot more simple than you might think, says Annie Mulgrew, founding instructor for CITYROW in New York City and NASM-certified CPT. "High-intensity interval training is a form of interval training that alternates between short bursts of intense energy or activity followed by minimal rest, ideally until that person is unable to continue," she explains.



What makes a HIIT workout

And, as Mulgrew notes, HIIT can be just about anything—from swimming to running to mountain climbers in your apartment to even weight training. The key, she says, is ensuring that the “short burst of energy” is at least 80 percent of your maximum effort (so, eight on a scale of 10).

“For HIIT to be effective, your ‘on’ intervals need to be all-out,” she says. Mulgrew also notes that your rest period shouldn’t exceed your active period (try, 20 seconds on and 10 seconds off). That rest period can contain no movement or moderate-effort movement—that part really isn’t important, she says. Those maximum-effort bursts are where the gains are made, Mulgrew reiterates.

In Mulgrew’s CITYROW classes, for example, that on/off scheme translates to both meters rowed on the rowing machine, as well as resistance training off the rower. “You may find short rowing distance repeats or hip thrusters programmed as 40 seconds on and 20 seconds off,” she says.

If you’re using weights for your HIIT workout, choose a weight that allows you to complete 10 to 20 reps repeatedly in your “on” periods, Mulgrew recommends. Beginners should aim for no more than 20 minutes of HIIT total. And if you’re a total HIIT nut, keep it no longer than 50 to 60 minutes (so the actual HIIT portion of the workout is around 30 minutes and the warm-up/cool-down roughly 20 minutes). “Going any longer than that would most likely mean you’re not able to maintain the intensity you need in order to achieve the benefits of a HIIT workout,” she says.

5 benefits of HIIT

Speaking of benefits, here are five major health perks associated with HIIT, plus, how to maximise your next interval workout.

1. You'll burn a boatload of calories—even after you've finished working out

Although aerobic exercise is a great tool in maintaining your heart health, as far as weight loss tactics go, that steady-state run isn't the best calorie-burner. And while weight training is typically the most reliable weight loss tactic when it comes to fitness type (remember though, weight loss is achieved through a calorie deficit, which is most easily achieved through diet), if there is one form of cardio that blasts calories, it's HIIT.

One 2015 study (of healthy men) that compared calorie burn after 30 minutes of HIIT to other forms of steady-state exercise noted that HIIT burned 25 to 30 percent more calories. Other studies (also on men) have noted that HIIT propels your production of human growth hormone, or HGH, upwards of 450 percent in the 24 hours following a session, increasing overall calorie burn.

2. They may help you lose fat quicker (especially around the midsection)

Yep—a study in *Journal of Diabetes Research* confirmed this. The researchers divided obese, sedentary women into groups: those who partook in a HIIT program and those who did a moderate-intensity (but continuous energy expenditure) routine. The former group achieved similar body composition and aerobic capacity results in half the time.

3. It doesn't require doing crazy workout moves

One major (assumed) drawback to HIIT, of course, is the notion you need to be flying, flailing, bounding, and sprinting (with a series of complicated tools, no less) in order to achieve a solid workout. But as Mulgrew points out, the hallmark of HIIT lies in exertion, not the modality, so pretty much any form of exercise fits—and that includes the simplest form of cardio there is: walking.

In one Japanese study, for five months, 700 middle- and older-aged adults engaged in walking intervals (shorter bursts of speed interspersed with periods of rest). At the conclusion of the study, the individuals had noticeably improved endurance and strength.

4. HIIT keeps your brain in shape

Studies have shown that regular HIIT exercise can boost your memory and make you sharper in everyday decision-making. One (potential) reason why, according to Mulgrew: "During a HIIT workout, you have to stay focused," she explains.

5. It's the perfect exercise for that perpetually strapped-for-time person

And, what's more, you don't have to sweat for very long in order to see results. A 2006 study compared two groups of college men for two weeks: those who did stationary bicycling at a moderate pace for roughly an hour-and-a-half to two hours for three times a week, and those who did six 30-second all-out sprints with four minutes of recovery.

Surprise, surprise: The HIIT-ers were just as fit (in terms of exercise performance and muscle growth) as those moderate-intensity exercisers by the end of the trial—with far less time invested.

How to get the most from your HIIT workout

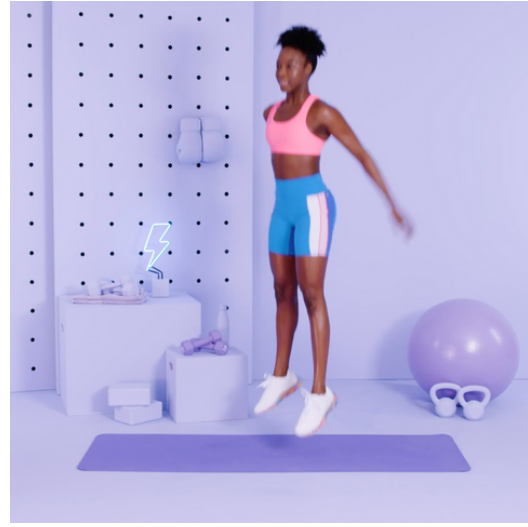
Here, Mulgrew shares her top tips for ensuring you blast through your next HIIT session.

1. **Prepare to go all-out.** "Choose exercises that you know how to perform well and that you are able to perform at an intense level (again at least 80 percent intensity)," Mulgrew says. "Monitor rest and keep it strict."
2. **But don't sacrifice form.** In that same vein, choosing exercises you know how to do well ensures you're not attempting to move your body in a new (and potentially injuring-causing) position. When in doubt, keep the "burst" simple.
3. **Warm up extra well.** Mulgrew recommends doing five to 10 (or more) minutes of dynamic stretching prior to jumping into a HIIT workout. "If you're doing traditional cardio HIIT work, establish a baseline of intensities at 50 to 70 percent intensity, and then build from there," she explains. "I always suggest doing the exercises you'll perform during your HIIT workout, but non-loaded, so your body knows how to move well first before going at higher intensities."
4. **Put your phone away.** "HIIT requires you to be attentive and focused," Mulgrew says. "You cannot get distracted. Otherwise, you will lose track of the clock. Use HIIT as a great way to give yourself your own full attention."

A 25-minute total-body HIIT routine

Be sure to warm up for at least five minutes prior to jumping in.

SQUAT JUMPS



How to: Start in a squat (feet under shoulders, toes facing forward, thighs parallel to floor) with torso upright and hands clasped in front of chest. Press through feet to straighten legs and jump up off the floor while swinging straight arms behind body. Land back in a squat position. That's one rep. Perform as many reps as possible for 45 seconds, then rest for 15 seconds. Repeat five times.

SQUAT JUMPS



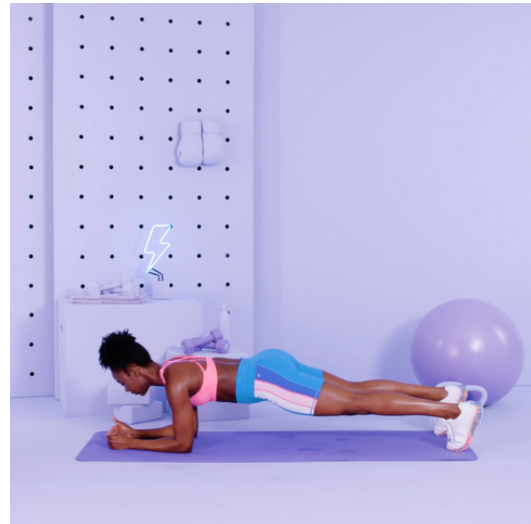
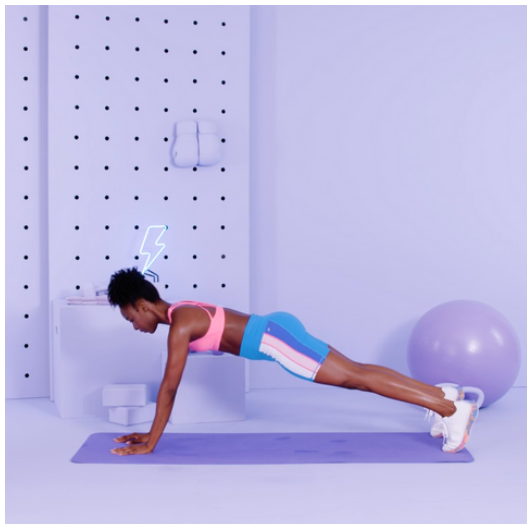
How to: Start standing with feet just wider than hips, a kettlebell in right hand, right arm bent with elbow close to body so that the weight rests on shoulder, and left hand on hip. Sink hips slightly into a quarter-squat. Then, quickly push through feet to extend legs, simultaneously pressing kettlebell straight up until right arm is completely extended overhead. With control, lower kettlebell back down. That's one rep. **Perform as many reps as possible for 45 seconds, then rest for 20 seconds. Repeat for five rounds.**

MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS



How to: Start in a high plank, shoulders over wrists, pelvis tucked, and ribs drawn toward hips. Drive your right knee toward your chest, then the left. Pull your right knee back toward your chest and pause. Repeat the pattern starting with the left knee. **Aim completing 45 seconds of work, followed by 15 seconds of rest. Complete for five rounds.**

PLANK GET-UP



How to: Start in a low plank with forearms on the floor and parallel, elbows under shoulders. Pick up right forearm and press through palm to extend arm straight. Then, repeat with left to come into a high plank, keeping hips as level as possible. Reverse the movement to return to start. That's one rep. **Perform as many reps as possible for 50 seconds, then rest for 10 seconds. Repeat for five rounds.**