

CARDIO EXPLAINED: EASY, STEADY, HARD

Stop guessing your pace. Use the talk test and mix three types of effort.

AT A GLANCE

- Most people train in the grey zone: too hard to be easy, too easy to be hard.
- The talk test is a simple, free way to set your effort.
- A good mix is mostly easy, a little hard, and a lot of walking.

THE TALK TEST

Effort	What it feels like	Effort (1 to 10)	What it is for
Easy	You can speak in full sentences. You could keep going for a long time.	3 to 4	Building your aerobic base, recovery, and most of your weekly volume. Often called "Zone 2".
Steady	Short sentences only. Comfortably uncomfortable.	6 to 7	Tempo runs, race-pace practice. Use it in small doses.
Hard	A few words at a time. You are glad when the interval ends.	8 to 9	Raising your top-end fitness. Short intervals with full recovery.

A SIMPLE BEGINNER MIX

- **2 easy sessions** of 30 to 45 minutes. Run, cycle, swim, row or walk fast.
- **1 interval session:** after a 10-minute warm-up, 6 x (1 minute hard, 2 minutes easy), then 5 minutes easy.
- **Walk every day.** It counts, it recovers you, and it adds up.

THE 4 MOST COMMON MISTAKES

1. Every session is medium-hard. You never recover enough to go hard when it counts, and you never go slow enough to build a base.

2. Easy days that are not easy. If you cannot hold a conversation, slow down. It will feel too slow at first. That is the point.

3. Increasing too fast. A common rule of thumb is to add no more than about 10% to your weekly volume, with an easier week every third or fourth week.

4. Skipping strength work. Strength training supports running economy and helps keep you injury-free. Two short sessions a week is plenty.

CHECK YOUR WEEKLY EFFORT

- ☐ At least two sessions this week where I could talk in full sentences.
- ☐ No more than one or two hard sessions, with a day in between.
- ☐ A walk on most days.
- ☐ I did not add more than about 10% to last week's volume.
- ☐ I slept 7 to 9 hours on most nights.

The talk test is a useful guide, not a lab test. If you feel chest pain, dizziness or unusual breathlessness, stop and speak to a doctor.

TRAINING FOR A RACE?

Our half marathon / marathon and HYROX programmes use this exact approach. ml77performance.co.uk

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Not medical advice. This guide is general information for healthy adults. Speak to a doctor or registered healthcare professional before changing your exercise or diet, especially if you have a medical condition, an injury, are pregnant or breastfeeding. **Sources:** NHS: physical activity guidelines for adults aged 19 to 64 (150 minutes moderate or 75 minutes vigorous activity a week). The talk test is a widely used practical guide to exercise intensity. Intensity zones and the weekly volume rule of thumb are coaching conventions, not fixed laws. © ML Performance Coaching.