

Training With Heart Rate Monitors

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Most modern exercise machines contain electronic displays showing calories burned, miles completed, feet or floors climbed or meters rowed. Now some exercise machines provide you with a means to monitor your heart rate. Are these advanced technical gadgets necessary? How accurate are these heart rate monitors?

Heart rate monitors are designed to provide an easy, convenient way to keep track of how hard your heart is working. There are many different kinds and brands of heart rate monitors. There are finger clip-ons, ear clip-ons, built-in sensors on a piece of the equipment (handle bar on a stationary bike), and a wireless chest strap worn with a watch display that picks up the signal from the strap and tells you how many beats per minute your heart is beating. So which one is the best and do you need one?

If you know how to palpate your own pulse, and can do it accurately, then a heart rate monitor may not be necessary. However, heart rate monitors provide the convenience of monitoring your heart rate without having to stop exercising. For this reason, heart rate monitors may be worth the investment. Your cardiovascular exercise will be more beneficial if performed continuously at your target heart rate.

The most accurate heart rate monitors utilize a wireless chest strap and a wristwatch type of receiver. Polar is a popular brand and is very accurate. Cardiologists often use them to monitor heart rates during exercise testing. All you do is place the belt on your skin just below the chest, put the watch on, press start, and you're in business! There are various kinds of wireless models—some for under water, some that read the temperature outside, but most people only need the monitor that displays the heart rate on the watch without any extra gizmos.

Remember the importance of monitoring your heart rate with exercise is to make sure you are training within your ideal range. Working too hard or not hard enough wastes exercise time, so working within a range based on age and intensity can help you exercise longer and make it more enjoyable.

If you would like to try out a heart rate monitor, stop by the Fitness Center and watch your heart work! Heart rate monitors are a fun, convenient way to keep track of heart values, but there is definitely nothing wrong with using those fingers to check it instead