

Intensity Matters

I just finished reading an article discussing research done by Martin Gibala, a scientist at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada. He claims that six minutes of exercise may be all you need, not each day, but each week! Now this research has a lot of people in the fitness and health care community in an uproar. It goes against all that has been ingrained in us for the last 30 years. Recommendations from the government still sit in the ranges of 20 minutes three times a week up to 60 to 90 minutes six times a week.

So how does he propose to do these six minutes of exercise? Ah, here is the catch. It has to be high intensity exercise. Not “Wow, this is hard. I’m going to be sore tomorrow.” Exercise, but “OH MY GOD I’M GOING TO PUKE OR PASS OUT!!!” exercise. To test his theory he took 10 run of the mill college students and had them ride for 50 minutes on a stationary bike at a moderate pace (what most of us do when we exercise at the gym) five days a week. Another group of 10 students did four to six 30 second all out sprints on the stationary bike three days a week. The study was done for six weeks. At the end of the time both groups showed equal cardiovascular changes and cell changes. In other words spending only six minutes a week exercising can make you better at endurance tasks, like running a marathon. Not just better, but be just as good as more than four hours of traditional exercise.

Some recent changes in workout styles by groups like *CrossFit* have embraced this high intensity ideal. Not to mention there are some older style wind sprint interval training regimens for running sports. It is not especially hard to implement a plan like this into your workout. Find an exercise that involves large muscle groups. Go at it hard for 20 to 30 seconds. Then rest for just enough time for your heart rate to come back to a pace you can talk at and then go to the next set. Do this for four to eight sets. Then collapse in the corner and whimper until recovered.

The next question of course, “Is this the best way to workout?” The answer, as with most complex questions, is, “it depends”. There is some reasonable research to show that building an aerobic base for part of the year and then moving to more intense short workouts may provide an ability to train longer at high intensity. For a high level athlete this is vitally important. For the rest of us it may mean that ultra high intensity, very short duration workouts may not be the only workout we should employ. This is why if you see me at the gym from one night to the next I may seem to be meandering and taking my time some nights at a slow steady pace and other nights I seem like a hyperactive hamster on three espressos racing from one exercise to the next. All in all, I like the idea that a variety of workouts are effective. Some nights I like to take my time; other nights I don’t have the time. On those nights I can workout intensely for a short time and not short change my body.

One closing thought that came from a doctor that was also a certified chiropractic sports physician was that in the midst of all this focus on high intensity, exercise form might be sacrificed. This is dangerous. If you choose to bump the intensity up to the “OH MY GOD” stage make sure that you are familiar with all the equipment and motions you are

going to do prior to starting. I find it best to warm up well and take a slow easy run through the exercises once prior to starting. If you have any questions of course ask a professional like a chiropractor, physical therapist or personal trainer.