

## Three-Speed Cardio

Cardio workouts stuck in one gear? Bust out of your rut — and build fitness — with this collection of metabolism-boosting workouts.

When it comes to cardio exercise, most gym-goers are either hares or tortoises: They like their workouts fast and furious or they like them slow and leisurely. Hares love the intensity of going full out; tortoises relish the relaxed groove of a meditative pace.

Both types of exercise have proven benefits. Problems can arise, however, when you stick too closely to one type of workout or the other. That's because your body runs on three separate but interrelated [metabolic](#) engines: the **aerobic**, the **glycolytic** and the **ATP-CP** systems. (For more on these systems, see [ELmag.com/energysystems](http://ELmag.com/energysystems).) Each is built to power you through a different type of exercise.

- Slow and steady long-distance exercise uses primarily the “aerobic” system.
- Quick-as-a-wink activities like sprinting and explosive athletic drills call on one of two anaerobic engines: the “glycolytic” system and the “ATP-CP” system.

These three systems work in tandem, so unless you incorporate some combination of all of them, you're missing out on health-and-fitness benefits. Furthermore, sticking doggedly to one speed — fast, slow or somewhere in the middle — will eventually lead to boredom, staleness and injury, all of which can bring your progress to a screeching halt.

For the gym-goer seeking maximal, across-the-board health and fitness, then, the solution is simple: Diversify. “Unless you have a specific performance goal in mind, the best plan is to do a combination of faster- and slower-paced cardio work,” says Declan Connolly, PhD, professor of exercise science at the University of Vermont, and coauthor of [Heart Rate Training](#) (Human Kinetics, 2011).

To get you started, we've pulled together three fun, innovative cardio workouts, each one at a different speed and intensity, which you can sub in for any cardio work you're currently doing. Perform as directed and in a few weeks you'll be moving, feeling and looking like a whole different animal.

### Your Mix-It-Up Cardio Plan

If you already exercise regularly, perform each workout once per week on nonconsecutive days, either directly after, or on a separate day from, your strength work. (For more ideas on scheduling your cardio around other activities, see our Web extra, below.) If you're new to cardio exercise, workout designer Diane Vives, MS, NSCA-CSCS, suggests doing just one or two of the cardio workouts a week, performing a different one each time you work out.

### Choose Your Intensity

All three workouts are safe for any injury-free gym-goer — provided you stick within the intensity parameters indicated in each workout.

For Workout 1, you can find the recommended intensity level by establishing the correct percentage of your maximum heart rate (MHR). Estimate your MHR by subtracting your age from 220 and multiplying the result by the appropriate percentage. A 40-year-old, for example, wanting to do Workout 1 at 60 percent of his MHR, would subtract 40 from 220 to get 180, and then multiply the result by 0.6 to get 108.

Use a heart-rate monitor — or simply take your pulse intermittently to gauge and adjust your speed and intensity accordingly: If your heart rate is too slow, go harder or faster; if it's too fast, slow down.

When doing Workouts 2 and 3, heart rate will be a less accurate measure of intensity. So for these workouts, estimate your intensity level using perceived-exertion clues like muscle fatigue, respiration rate and sweat rate. Keep your effort level in check for the first week or so, until you're familiar with the exercises, pace and flow of each workout.

“Most people have a decent sense of how hard they're capable of working,” Connolly says. “Over time, you'll develop an increasingly accurate sense of what an 80 percent effort, a 90 percent effort, or a 100 percent effort feels like.”

And over time, of course, your performance at each [intensity](#) level will increase.

## Workout 1: The Slow and Steady Mix

**Metabolic system:** Aerobic

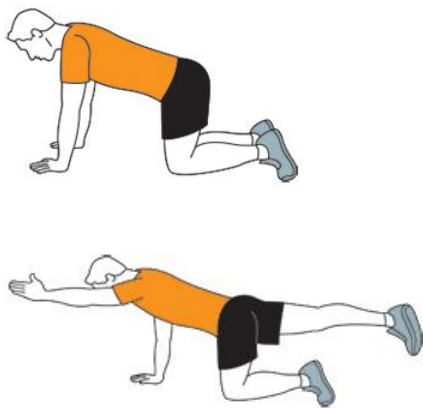
**Intensity level:** 60 percent of max heart rate

**Duration:** 30 minutes

**Benefits:** Improves cardiovascular health, endurance and fat-burning capacity; can support recovery from higher-intensity types of exercise.

**How to do it:** Pedal a bicycle (or an upright or recumbent stationary bike) for five minutes at approximately 60 percent of your MHR. Get off the bike and perform exercise (a), below, for one minute. Get back on the bike for five minutes, and then do exercise (b). Repeat this process as you move through all the exercises below, for a total of 30 minutes.

### A. One-Arm/One-Leg Reaching Balance



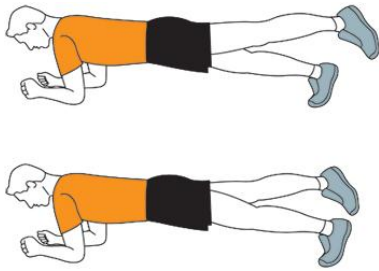
- Get on all fours with your hands beneath your shoulders, your knees beneath your hips, and your head aligned with your spine.
- Engage your abs, then extend your right leg directly behind you and your left arm as far forward as possible, thumb up (your upper arm will be near your left ear).
- Hold this position for 30 seconds, switch sides and repeat.



### B. Walkouts

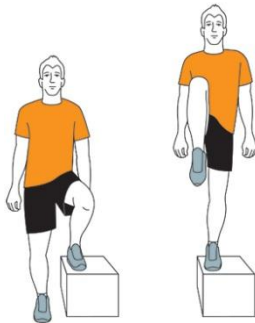
- Get into a plank position, body straight from head to heels, and hands beneath your shoulders.
- Without bending your knees, walk your hands backward until they are as close to your feet as possible.
- Reverse the movement, walking your hands as far forward as possible without letting your lower back sag.
- Continue walking your hands forward and back for 60 seconds.

### C. Plank With Alternating Leg Lift



- Get into a plank position, body straight from head to heels, and weight on your forearms and the balls of your feet.
- Maintaining this alignment, lift your left leg about 12 inches off the floor, keeping the left knee straight.
- Pause, lower the leg to the floor, and repeat on the other side, alternating sides for 60 seconds.

### D. Side-Step to Balance



- Stand upright with your left side near an aerobic step or a box that's set to knee height.
- Place your left foot on the box and step onto it, lifting your right knee as far upward as you can.
- Pause, return slowly to the starting position, and repeat for 30 seconds.
- Step off the box, switch sides and repeat.

### E. Lying Bridge Marches



- Lie on your back on an exercise mat with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.
- Lift your left foot off the floor and press down through your right foot, lifting your hips as high as possible and contracting your right glute as hard as you can.
- Lower your hips to the floor and repeat the movement with the opposite foot.
- Alternate sides for 60 seconds.

### Workout 2: 20-Minute Madness

**Metabolic system:** Glycolytic

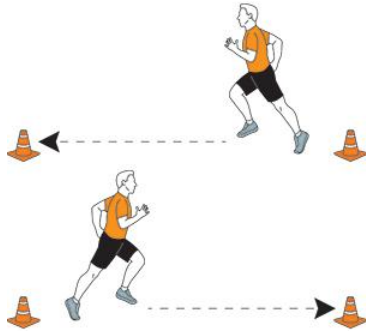
**Intensity level:** 80 to 85 percent of max effort

**Duration:** About 20 minutes

**Benefits:** Maintains strength, muscle mass and range of motion in key joints; increases fat loss and improves body composition; increases human growth hormone; improves core strength and stability.

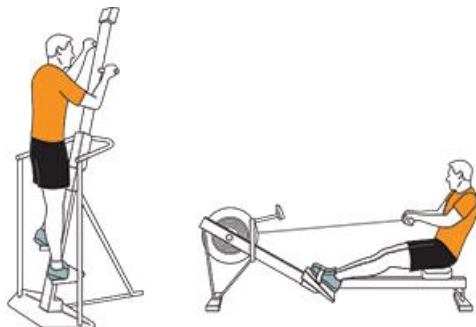
**How to do it:** Perform the following two drills, (a) and (b), alternately for a total of three rounds (six drills total). If space or equipment is limited, you can also opt to do just one of the drills a total of six times. Rest two minutes after each exercise.

#### A. 200-Meter Shuttle



- Set up two cones, 25 meters apart.
- Run back and forth between the two cones four times for a total of 200 meters. (To the cone and back is one time.)

#### B. Rowing Machine, Versaclimber or Stationary Bike



- Perform a one-minute interval on any one of these machines at a challenging speed or resistance level that you can maintain for the full 60 seconds.

#### Workout 3: Athlete's Grab Bag

**Metabolic system:** ATP-CP

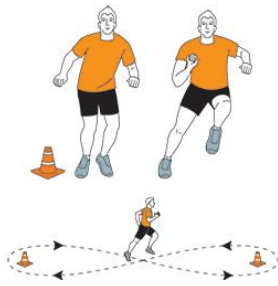
**Intensity level:** 90 to 95 percent of max effort

**Duration:** 10 to 15 minutes

**Benefits:** Improves sports performance; increases coordination, athleticism and ability to move quickly when necessary.

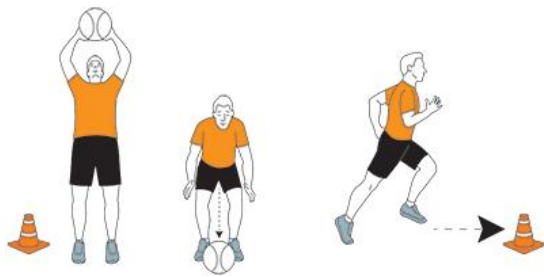
**How to do it:** Set up two cones 15 meters apart. Perform the following three 10- to 20-second exercises as a circuit, moving as fast and explosively as you can throughout each drill, and resting for 30 to 60 seconds after each one. Perform three circuits.

### A. Skater to Figure-Eight Run



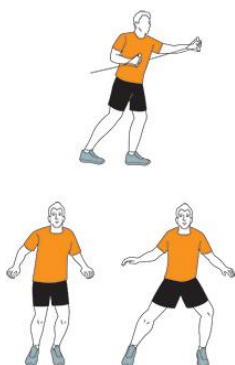
- Stand upright near one cone with your feet together.
- Pushing off of your right foot, leap directly to your left as far as possible.
- Stick the landing, pause briefly, then repeat, this time leaping to your left.
- Perform a total of two skaters on each side, then sprint in a figure-eight pattern around the two cones.

### B. Ball Slam to Sprint



- Stand near one of the cones holding a D-ball (a sand-filled medicine ball that does not bounce) or a medicine ball that weighs about 5 percent of your body weight.
- From a shoulder-width, parallel stance, raise the ball overhead and slam it to the floor in front of you as hard as you can.
- Pick up the ball and repeat for five reps.
- Sprint to the other cone as fast as you can.

### C. Band Punch to Side-Shuffle Shuttle Run



- Loop an elastic exercise band around a stationary object (a power rack, for example) and hold the handles in your hands.
- Turn away from the anchor point, walk forward until the band is taut, and hold the handles near your shoulders.
- Alternately punch your hands forward as fast as possible, until you've done 10 punches with each hand.
- Drop the handles and side-shuffle as fast as possible 10 steps to your left, then 10 steps to your right.