How to Get Your Best Heart Workout on a Treadmill

Get to the heart of the matter. Rather than striving for speed or distance, focus on reaching your target heart rate and sustaining it for periods of at least 10 minutes building gradually to a total of at least 150 minutes of exercise per week in your heart range. Tracking your pulse (heart rate) is a simple and accurate way to know how hard your ticker is working. For most healthy individuals, the following steps can help determine your personal target heart rate range:

- Calculate your maximum heart rate by subtracting your age from the number 220. For example, if your age is 40, your maximum heart rate is 180 bpm (beats per minute).

- Set your target heart rate (60% to 80% of your maximum heart rate) is an effective and low risk range. If you’re 40, that would be 108 to 153 bpm.

- To manually assess your pulse: Lightly press your index, second and third finger tips on the palm side of the opposite wrist below the base of the thumb. Count the beats for 10 seconds, then multiply by six to get your heart rate in beats per minute.

- Maintain your target heart rate for as long as you’re comfortable — even if it’s only a few minutes. Gradually work up to 30 minutes.

Ready? Get set, and go! Once you know your target heart rate, you’re ready to exercise.

- Warm up by walking slowly for the first 5 minutes.

- Increase the settings to a speed and grade that feels comfortable to you. Your heart rate should level out after 3 to 5 minutes of continuous activity. If you are below your target heart rate range after that time, gently increase the treadmill’s speed and/or incline until you reach and maintain your target heart rate range.

- As you learn the settings that allow you to reach your heart rate range, you can vary the speed and incline to change up the activity during the session. Steeper grades increase the focus of the exercise on your glutes, hamstrings and calves.

- For variety and additional long-term benefit, mix it up. Instead of trudging along at a steady pace for the entire session, plan a couple of sessions each week that mix bursts of high and low intensity.

- Exercise at the pace that gets you into your 60% to 70% heart rate range for 2 minutes. Then increase the settings to raise your heart rate up to 90% of your peak heart rate for 60 seconds. Alternate between slower and faster paces for 20 to 30 minutes.

How are you doing? Periodically stop and take your pulse. (You may prefer to use your fitness tracker’s heart rate monitor or your independent heart rate monitor to avoid interrupting the exercise). Your goal is to reach and sustain your target heart rate.

Remember to get an exercise prescription. Be sure to work out at least three days each week and gradually increase the resistance and duration of your exercise. A good goal is to achieve a target of at least 150 minutes per week. As always, check with your doctor to find the best approach for you.

Additional Sources
http://my.clevelandclinic.org/services/heart/prevention/exercise/pulse-target-heart-rate