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The Bottom Line on SIT

Let's take a closer look at the study on Sprint Interval Training (1). Researchers recruited 30 sedentary and overweight men, average age 27. They randomly assigned the subjects to one of three groups: a control group who just kept on with their sedentary lifestyle; a group who performed moderate-intensity exercise for 50 minutes three times per week; and the sprint interval group who did three 20-second all-out sprints interspersed with warm-up, recovery, and cool down for a total of 10 minutes, also three days per week. All exercise was performed on exercise bikes and the study lasted 12 weeks.



The researchers reported that the results between the two exercise groups were similar. They both increased their fitness levels, improved their ability to use sugar and insulin, and lost weight compared to the control group. Is it time to switch to SIT for our exercise program?

Not exactly.

These were the most unfit group of men for their age I've ever seen: even after 12 weeks of exercise, they were still in poor condition no matter which group they were in.

There were small differences in the weight loss between the groups. The 50-minute exercise group lost twice as much as the 10-minute group. Don't get too excited: the 50-minute group lost 4.4 pounds while the 10-minute group lost about two pounds. Of course, if this difference were to continue, it means that investing more time in exercise would be better over the long haul—but that's not exactly a surprise, is it?

Let's turn to the sugar and insulin metabolism tests. The problem was that the numbers were normal to begin with. How much better could they get if they were already normal and healthy? Lower doesn't convey more benefits.

The problem with SIT is that it's extremely strenuous. I did it based on the profile they gave in the paper, and I could barely last the 20 seconds—my legs were on fire. That type of strenuous activity wouldn't be possible for most people over 40 due to the risk of injury or coronary event. You would really have to get cleared by a physician to do this one.

The Bottom Line

I think that the research this group is doing is interesting, and I think it may have some utility as part of an overall approach to fitness. But I think that's about it. You get 10 minutes of results out of 10 minutes of exercise. You can get more benefit if it's high intensity than you would if it were just a 10-minute easy walk, but you benefit from both approaches.

I'm going to use SIT in my next optimal fitness CD, tentatively titled *Optimal Performance: The Fat-Burning Program*. I've been doing it as part of one of my workouts. Once you train your body to burn fat as a fuel in the Basic Program, the next step is to intentionally get rid of excess fat. It's a work in progress and when I'm done, you'll know.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

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