

## Embracing Your Exertion and Recovery Cycle- Using It to Achieve better Health “Wellness Matters”

By Lisa Schilling

We don't easily change our nature in life. So it makes sense that your fitness type should match your natural bent. It is also important to understand your approach to exercise.

For years, people have been told to workout long and steady, aiming for thirty to forty-five minutes in their target heart range. However, there is REAL benefit from doing short (less than one minute) bursts of intense exercise, recovering, and then repeating that pattern (interval approach).

In fact, this cyclic form of exercise can have tremendous health benefits. An interval approach involves giving an all-out effort over a short period of time—like a minute. This short burst hits the fat stores more intensely.

It floods the body with antioxidants and anti-inflammatory benefit during the recovery phase. Inflammation has been known to cause multiple problems in the body. This is another reason to utilize these anti-inflammatory types of exercise.

Exercise is good medicine; the changes that occur in the body during the exertion and rest cycle are restorative. History shows that our ancestors ran from predators, chased their prey, and then rested. Our physiology evolved according to these bursts of exertion and complete recovery. A cascade of healing occurs during the recovery phase.

Planning adequate exertion and recovery time is a vital part of any wellness plan. Building these contrasts into your schedule is essential to your long-term vitality. Understanding this cyclic approach is important. Too often we focus on the exertion side of the equation and neglect the recovery side.

People tend to look at the body as a mechanical object. But the exertion and recovery approach looks at the body differently. The circulatory, endocrine, and muscular systems are all cyclic in nature, and this type of exercise enhances the body's circadian rhythm.

If you ask someone, “Can you go hard for one minute, then rest?” most people are

willing to try it. If, on the other hand, you say, “Go hard for forty-five minutes,” there is a less than enthusiastic response.

This short exertion followed by recovery approach, challenges our physiology and puts the highs and lows back into chemical and circulatory responses. It also can deter adaptation.

Another aspect of the exertion and recovery approach is creating sharp contrasts. Contrasts help to build healthy rhythms in our bodies. Cycles such as complete darkness followed by complete light, or being hot followed by being cold, assist the body's cyclic nature.

The prehistoric hunter-gatherer experienced these extremes each day. Today our artificial temperature control and lighting put restrictions on this natural physiology. To achieve better health benefits, we need to equally alternate these highs and lows.

Exercise affects *heart rate variability* (HRV), which is the measure of time between heartbeats. It should fluctuate with every respiration. A loss of heart rate variability has been identified as a risk factor common to all causes of death. When you are young and the heart muscle is flexible, there is variance in beat-to-beat measure. As you age, chronic disorders set in, and you lose your HRV.

What these short bursts of all-out effort do is help restore that variability. It can be like “yoga for the heart” and acts as a homeopathic dose of exercise. These bursts are not enough to trigger respiratory fatigue, but are sufficient to generate the anti-inflammatory responses during the recovery phases.

Utilize interval walking to see increased results. For interval walking, check your pulse and take note of it. Add a short ten- to thirty-second “sprint,” followed by slower recovery walking. (“Sprint” is a relative term based on your fitness level—consider your best attempt to flee if the house were on fire!) Gradually build back to your brisk walk. Take your pulse again.

When your heart rate has recovered to pre-sprint levels, you may sprint again. You will benefit from the elevated heart rate even when returning to the slower pace. Follow this pattern regularly, and you will get more benefit for your time of purposeful movement!