

# STEADY STATE CARDIO FITNESS

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## What is Steady State Cardio?

When it comes to fitness training and exercise, there's no shortage of options and approaches. From endurance to high intensity interval training (or HIIT), it seems there's something for everyone. This is good for a number of reasons.

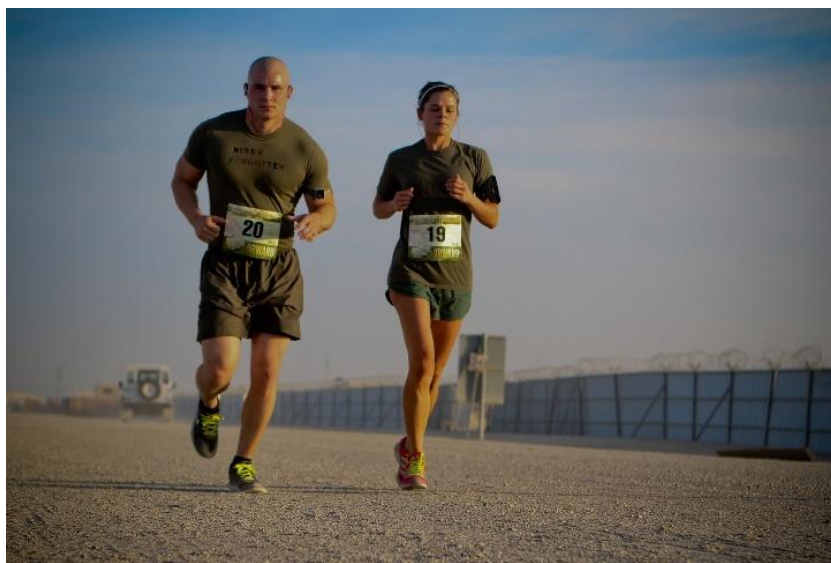
One, there's no one right way to exercise that works for everyone. Two, people have different exercise personalities, and while one person may enjoy going for a five-hour run, another person may only want to lift weights.

Steady state cardio is one exercise and fitness approach that works for many because it's straightforward and easy to embrace, and because it can lend itself to mindfulness and mindful fitness – something that's on a lot of people's minds.

### **So, what is steady state cardio?**

Steady state cardio is simply a cardio workout where you put out a continuous, steady effort.

For example, with interval training you moderate intensity, right? You might sprint for a minute and then walk for a minute. With steady state cardio, you don't vary the intensity. You find a pace that you can maintain for a predetermined distance or amount of time and you go.



The concept of steady state can be applied to just about any type of exercise. If you can do interval training for something, then you can also do steady state. However, we're talking specifically about steady state cardio, so this naturally assumes that you're going to increase your heart rate and get an aerobic workout. Steady state keeps your heart rate at a moderate level. It's a pace that you can maintain for 20-30 minutes at a time or more. Aerobic or cardio workout means that you're using oxygen for energy.

Anaerobic, a state that you can get to with sprinting and high intensity exercise, requires your cells to utilize other resources besides oxygen for energy and muscle contraction.

There are benefits to both types of exercise, and we'll talk more about integrating steady state cardio into a comprehensive or holistic exercise program. For right now, let's talk about different types of cardio exercise and then dive into the many benefits of steady state.

## Types of Cardio

- Walking
- Running
- Bicycling
- Swimming
- Exercise machine like stair stepper, elliptical, treadmill, spin bike, etc.
- Jumping rope
- Rowing



## Benefits of Steady State

There are a number of benefits to embracing steady state cardio. In fact, you may be surprised, with all the attention that HIIT gets, that more people aren't talking about steady state.

### Faster Recovery

For many, after a few weekly HIIT sessions, you just need a day off. Your entire body is sore, and you need a break. With low intensity steady state cardio, you don't put your body through the same challenges. Yes, you're still exercising, but there's a huge difference physically between sprint repeats and a casual jog.

### Easily Accessible

Steady state generally doesn't require any particularly equipment. You can embrace steady state with your walking or running shoes and head out your front door. You can also head to the gym, find your favorite piece of equipment, and work out for 30 minutes. You don't have to hire a personal trainer to show you how to do it, and you don't need to invest in pricey memberships or equipment.

### Mindfulness

One of the best ways to embrace mindful fitness is through steady state cardio. It can be relatively easy to get in the zone and stay present when you're not pushing yourself to exhaustion.

### Increased Endurance

For many who sit at a desk all day and then embrace a 10-minute HIIT session, endurance is an issue. It's difficult to go for a several hour hike. You just don't have the right systems developed to sustain physical activity for more than a few minutes. Sure, you may look amazing, but your endurance isn't strong.

Steady state helps you increase your endurance, which means you'll be able to apply that newfound endurance to other activities and pursuits in your life, whether it's hiking in the mountains, skiing all day, or trying your hand at endurance sports.



## Fat Burning

While HIIT is still better for fat burning and weight loss, you can still burn calories and fat with steady state cardio. In fact, you can use steady state as an active recovery day.

Active recovery is a day when you're not strength training or working out intensely, but rather than sit on the couch you go out and move your body. You're not pushing yourself physically, but you're not sedentary either. Steady state is an ideal active recovery approach and can heighten fat burning and weight loss.

It can also be stated that steady state banishes workout boredom, especially when steady state becomes a part of an overall approach. It's a fantastic way to get off the couch and get started with an exercise program, and it's just plain good for your heart and mind.

There's no pressure with steady state. You're just out moving your body in a low intensity way.



## Are There Any Drawbacks to Steady State?

Nothing is perfect, and often the flaws in an exercise approach are related to user error. That is definitely the case with steady state cardio. The two challenges with this approach include:

### Weight Gain

When it comes to steady state cardio, you will burn calories. However, you won't burn as many as you might with HIIT or other types of training. And if you go out for a run that burns 300 calories, but come home and eat 400 calories, then you're consuming 100 or more calories than you burned.

This is a challenge for many exercisers, and it's definitely a challenge of steady state. You shouldn't be hungry when you finish a steady state cardio unless you didn't eat before you worked out or you haven't eaten for a few hours. It's not the type of workout where you need to supplement calories.

### Injury

Chronic steady state, meaning that you do the same thing every day and you do it for a long time, can cause injury. For example, let's say you go out every day for a slow three-mile run. This is great in theory because you're getting good exercise. However, you're not doing any type of cross-training and you're not taking any rest days. This is a recipe for injury. Vary your workouts. Take rest days. Avoid injury.

Okay, now that you know the pros and the cons of steady state cardio (and how to avoid those cons), let's talk a bit more in depth about steady state and look at the "5 whys."

# The 5 Whys of Steady State Cardio: The Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How of Steady State

## Who is it good for (and is there anyone it isn't good for)?

Steady state cardio is terrific for anyone, but it really provides tremendous benefit for particular types of people. Those people include:

### **Off the Couchers**

If you're new to exercise or you haven't exercised in a long time, then steady state is a fantastic way to get started or to get back into it. It helps you slowly integrate exercise into your life. We've already talked about how it boosts endurance, which is great if you're off the couch and a 5-minute HIIT workout can feel like a heart attack.

Steady state is a perfect way to find your groove and get comfortable with exercise and a new fitness routine.

### **Taking it to The Next Levelers**

If you want to push your current workout routine and take it to the next level, then steady state is for you. For example, maybe you're taking a couple fitness classes each week. Adding one or two steady state workouts can help you push your fitness and increase your weight loss.

## What does it look like?

What does steady state look like? It looks like you heading out your front door for a brisk 20-30-minute walk. It looks like you getting on your bicycle and riding the local trails for a nice relaxed workout. It looks like you getting on the rower or elliptical and watching a program on a screen while you get your heart rate up to a moderate rate. A moderate rate means that you can easily carry on a conversation while you're working out. You're not gasping for breath.



## **Where can you do it?**

Steady state cardio can be done anywhere. In fact, if you travel a lot for your job, the hotel gym is a fantastic place for a steady state workout. You can also get out and about and explore town on your bike or your feet while getting in a cardio workout. You can do it at the gym, outside, in your home or on the go.

## **When is the best time?**

The best time to get in a steady state workout is whenever it works best for you. That said, most fitness experts and lifestyle change experts agree that if you want to make something a priority, that usually means doing it first thing in the morning. You can start the day with a jog or a walk around the block. You can get on your treadmill and watch the morning news before you get ready for work.

Of course, because steady state is not high intensity, it can also be done in the evening. It shouldn't impact your sleep. This works well for night owls or people who get to work early in the morning and come home earlier in the day.

## **Why Steady State?**

We've already talked about the benefits of steady state. You know that it helps you increase endurance, it burns calories, it's pretty easy to do and it doesn't have the same wear and tear on your body that some other exercise programs may. It works quite well for an active rest day if you're an avid exerciser, and it's a good introduction to exercise if you're new to exercise or haven't done it for quite some time.

## How long, how often?

Generally speaking, it's a good idea to make your steady state cardio a 20-40-minute workout. Now you don't have to go out today and jog for 40 minutes. What you can do, is go out for a relaxed 10-minute jog. Next week, add a few minutes to that and make it a 15-minute jog.

Gradually increase the time that you're able to exercise and remember to keep your pace steady. If that means that you're jogging a 14-minute mile, then that's just fine. The goal here is to maintain a steady heart rate at a moderate intensity.

How often you should exercise is a question that depends largely on your current fitness practices. If you're a frequent exerciser and you're adding steady state to an existing program, then consider twice a week, once if you're using it as an active rest day.

If, however, you are new to exercise then try to embrace steady state three times a week and add one strength, mobility, and HIIT workout to your week as well.

So now you know the basics about steady state, and maybe you're starting to contemplate how you might embrace or try out this exercise approach. In the next section we'll talk about how to integrate steady state into your workout program. We'll talk about it with HIIT, strength training, and a combination of the two.



## Integrating Steady State into Your Workout Program

In this section we'll talk about how to add steady state into your workout program. We'll also provide examples of different workouts you might use in your weekly workout program.

### Steady State and HIIT

HIIT stands for High Intensity Interval Training. These are typically short workouts performed at a high intensity. During a HIIT workout you're giving 100% effort. There's no pacing. It's just GO!

As you might imagine, a HIIT workout can burn a lot of calories. Not only are you expending a ton during your workout, the recovery period for an HIIT workout can last 24 hours, and during that time you're burning more calories.

HIIT is terrific for weight loss, but it can take a toll on your body. It's difficult to do HIIT every day of the week. This is where steady state can really help. You can use steady state once or twice a week for active recovery. You're still burning calories and moving, you're just not pushing your body so hard.



**Here's an example of what an integrated week might look like:**

- Sunday Rest Day
- Monday HIIT
- Tuesday HIIT
- Wednesday Steady State
- Thursday HIIT
- Friday HIIT
- Saturday Steady State

**Continuing with this weekly plan, your HIIT workouts could be:**

***Interval Training at the Track*** – sprint a 400, walk a 400. Repeat 4 times so you're sprinting one mile and walking one mile. (You could also cut the distance in half and sprint 200, walk 200.)

***Tabata Pushups, Pullups, Sit-ups, and Squats*** – A Tabata is 20 seconds of work followed by 10 seconds of rest, repeated 8 times for a 4-minute workout. During the "work" phase you perform as many repetitions of the movement as possible.



**Spin Bike Sprints** – If you have a spin bike, a treadmill, or even a rowing machine, you can go all out for 30 seconds and then pedal, walk or row, for 30 seconds. Repeat this until you can no longer get the same results from your sprint. For example, if you find that you're able to row 50 meters in 30 seconds, then when your distance drops to below 40, you are done with your sprint workout.

Steady State workouts with this weekly workout plan might be rowing a 5k at a moderate heart rate pace. Remember, you should be able to hold a conversation while you're working out. If you can't, then you're working too hard. Additionally, you should be able to hold the same pace throughout the entire workout.

Jog or walk three miles on the other steady state day. Keep the guidelines for steady state in mind; don't try to get a new personal best 5K time!



## Steady State and Strength

With steady state cardio and a strength training program, you'll likely strength train two to three days a week, take at least one rest day, and the remaining days will be steady state. It's recommended, with a strength training program as well as other fitness programs, to vary your cardio.

This means that even though you may want to run most days, it's beneficial to also try other cardio exercises like rowing, cycling, and even swimming. Cross-training provides a number of benefits and it helps prevent injury. It helps you create better overall fitness.

- Sunday Rest Day
- Monday Strength
- Tuesday Steady State
- Wednesday Strength
- Thursday Steady State
- Friday Strength
- Saturday Steady State





Strength training programs might include anything from a heavy deadlift day to working to get a solid 20 push press rep in at a moderate weight. Here's an example of what your week might look like:

**Monday** - Kettlebell Workout

3 Rounds of:

- 30 Kettlebell swings
- 30 Kettlebell deadlifts
- 30 Goblet squats (holding the kettlebell between your hands and in front of your chest while you squat)

**Tuesday** – Run for 30 minutes – Steady State Cardio

**Wednesday** – 50 Turkish Getups with Kettlebell

**Thursday** – Row/elliptical for 45 minutes

**Friday** – 1 Rep Max Push Press (work up to your heaviest push press)

**Saturday** – Swim 30 minutes

**Sunday** – Rest day



This schedule is an example of the amazing variety you can get from two basic workout approaches. You might alternate muscle groups during the week or spend each week with a specific strength focus. You decide.

Next, we're going to talk about integrating steady state cardio into a workout program that includes strength and HIIT.

## Steady State, Strength, And HIIT

- Sunday Rest Day
- Monday Strength
- Tuesday Steady State
- Wednesday HIIT
- Thursday Strength
- Friday HIIT
- Saturday Steady State

With this schedule you are getting two workouts of each type. You might, however, adjust the schedule so that you get more of one type than the other, depending on your focus. Sometimes you don't know how a program is going to work for you until you try it out. If you're unsure, consider trying the schedule above and see how it goes.

We've provided examples of HIIT workouts, as well as steady state and strength routines. Feel free to mix and match and create your own programming.

Before we talk about tips to get started with steady state and how to move forward confidently, let's talk a bit about mobility, because it should be a part of your weekly fitness program.

## Rest Days, Mobility, and How to Stay Strong, Healthy, and Working Out with Confidence

Mobility. It's the one thing that everyone talks about, but few people actually do. What is mobility? It's paying attention to and spending time focusing on the health and vitality of your muscles, tendons, and ligaments.

When you exercise, you use your muscles and connective tissues. If you don't do a bit of mobility work, those tissues can become tight and fixed. This can lead to injuries and prolonged soreness.

## Examples of mobility include:

**Using a foam roller.** You can roll out problem areas including sore muscles, or the ever-tight IT band found along the outside of your leg between your hip and your knee.

**Static stretching.** This is when you hold a stretch. For example, sitting on the floor and leaning forward to hold your toes is a static stretch.

**Dynamic stretching.** This is when you flex and extend a muscle as you stretch. An example might be a side lunge, alternating sides.

To continue to stay strong and able to not only perform your workouts well, but to also recover well, mobility must be part of your program.

So, when can you add mobility to your life?

**Daily is an option.** Every morning or every night you can get out the foam roller and roll something, anything. You can stretch or roll during commercials when you're watching television at night. It doesn't take much, five minutes a day is enough.



**Weekly at a minimum.** If daily mobility isn't an option for you, or you just know you're not going to do it, then commit to spending ten minutes stretching and rolling on your off day. You don't have to do it all at once. You can break it up and stretch during commercials. You won't regret this small addition to your fitness program and your body will respond favorably.

Oh, and FYI, massage is also considered mobility so go ahead and book that appointment!

In addition to mobility, hydration, nutrition, good sleep and stress management are all part of a comprehensive fitness program. Fitness and health go hand in hand. You'll have better workouts and recover more quickly when you take exceptional care of yourself.

## Tips to Go Forward with Confidence

You now have an abundance of information on the basic how's and whys of steady state. You know how to integrate it into your existing workout.

Next, we're going to offer some tips to help you embrace steady state with confidence so that you have fun while you're working out and getting in shape.

### Tip #1 Start with once a week

If you're new to exercising or you have a pretty packed workout program already, just start with one weekly steady state cardio workout. This will help you get used to what steady state feels like and how to approach it. You may find that it fits so well into your day that you add two or three more steady state workouts to your week – or you may find that once a week is enough.

### #2 Assess

As you begin steady state you'll want to pay close attention to how your body is reacting to it. The goal is for you to feel good, but not even remotely exhausted after your workout. Your energy level shouldn't dip, and you shouldn't feel hungry after your workout.

This means paying close attention to your pacing and exertion levels while you're exercising. Remember, steady state means finishing your workout at the same intensity that you began your workout – not necessarily the same pace.

Here's the difference. You may start at a 9-minute mile relaxed pace, but the longer you run, the harder that 9-minute mile pace may feel. To maintain the same level of exertion, your pace may drop to 10 or even 11 minutes. Wearing a heart rate monitor is one way to measure your effort. You want to keep it in a low to moderate zone.

Another way to measure your intensity and exertion is to pay attention to your breathing. If you can't talk and hold a conversation while you're exercising, then you may be pushing yourself too hard.

After the workout and the next day, pay attention to your energy levels, caloric intake, and muscle soreness. If you experience a drop in energy, a need to eat more than normal, or you're sore the next day, then you may have pushed yourself too hard.

### **#3 Is it Enjoyable or Do You Hate It?**

Find something that you enjoy doing or can do for an hour without hating it. For example, if the treadmill makes you sad, what about a spin bike or a jog around the park? It doesn't make any sense to force yourself to do something that you hate. For one thing, it's difficult to motivate yourself to do something you dislike. Besides, life is short. Exercise is important, but it shouldn't be awful.

### **#4 Find A Workout Partner**

Partners are a wonderful way to:

- Enjoy the workout a bit more
- Motivate yourself to work out because your partner is counting on you
- Make the time pass more quickly
- Help you find an appropriate steady state pace

### **#5 Make Sure You're Properly Fueled and Hydrated**

Generally speaking, unless you're struggling with blood sugar issues, you don't need to eat anything before or during your steady state workout. You should be able to exercise for up to an hour without eating.

You probably also don't need to run or exercise with any water or hydration. Unless you're working out for longer than one hour, or you're working out in particularly hot or dry weather, then you should be good to go. However, you do want to make sure that you begin the workout well hydrated.





Consider making sure that you drink at least 8 ounces of water in the hour before you work out.

The same is true post-workout. Eat when you're hungry and it's mealtime, and drink often. Proper hydration helps with recovery, sleep, and energy levels throughout your day.

## **#6 Get the Gear**

While steady state generally doesn't require any special gear, getting some fun gear can make it more fun and make you feel more confident. So, what is "fun" gear?

New shoes. If you're going to be walking or running, good shoes can help protect your feet and joints.

New workout clothing. Shorts, tights, and exercise tops are all good to wear when you're working out. They help wick sweat away from your body and may motivate you to exercise.

Accessories. If you're exercising outside, such as walking, running, or bicycling, and you're going to be out when it's dark or when the sun is setting/rising, please make sure that you're visible. Wear reflective clothing at a minimum, and consider a headlamp or flashlight to make sure you can see where you're going.

Other accessories might include a fitness tracker, a heart rate monitor, sunglasses, a music player, and so on.

## **#7 Create a Plan**

Create your steady state cardio fitness plan. Plan out 30 days of exercise, stick to it, and then take a look at your results. What worked well? What didn't? What do you need to change going forward?

Steady state cardio can be a truly beneficial addition to any workout program. Whether you've been exercising for years, or you're new and this is your first fitness plan, it's a highly effective and useful approach.

Enjoy steady state and the benefits it provides.