






## CARDIOVASCULAR EXERCISE MACHINES: WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

A good gym will offer a wide choice of cardiovascular exercise machines, from stair climbers to recumbent bikes. Which ones will help you burn calories fastest? Which ones also give you a weight bearing workout to build strong bones? A trainer can show you how to use each machine, if you're just starting a gym program. Stick with what's most comfortable and enjoyable, says Dr. Cedric Bryant, Chief Science Officer for the American Council on Exercise. The following is based in part on his advice.

(Source: UC Berkeley Wellness Letter, March 2009)

Machine	What it does	Advantages	Disadvantages	Tips
<p style="text-align: center;">Elliptical trainer</p> 	Provides one of the best and safest aerobic workouts, exercising your upper body (chest, arms, shoulders, and upper back) as you work the movable poles, and your lower body as you pump the pedals, which move in an elliptical motion. Changing the incline adds climbing.	Can burn lots of calories. Weight-bearing (to help build bones). Lower in impact than a treadmill. Good for those with knee problems and those recovering from an injury or with arthritis. May appeal to runners looking for low-impact exercise. You can also step backwards to work different leg and buttock muscles and vary your routine.	If you're very short or very tall, the machine's stride may not match your own. Since you work the machine your self, it's also easy to slow down unintentionally.	Maintain good posture. Don't grip the poles too tightly. Rest your arms occasionally on the stationary poles if you get tired. Alternate forward and backward pedaling and slower/faster speeds. Don't bend your knees more than 90 degrees.
<p style="text-align: center;">Treadmill</p> 	The most popular machine, you can use it for brisk walking or running. Running on it can burn even more calories than an elliptical trainer, since it works more muscles, especially if you pump your arms.	Weight-bearing. Easy to use. Belts have cushioning, so impact is lower than walking or running outdoors, but not as low as an elliptical trainer or a stationary bike. Easy to increase speed and sometimes incline. You can swing or pump your arms for additional calorie burning and aerobic benefits.	Not ideal if you've had an ankle, knee, or leg injury. If you have a balance problem or feel uneasy on a moving belt, compensate by holding onto the bars — you'll still get a good workout. If your balance problem is severe, don't use a treadmill.	Start at an easy 3-mph pace; speed up gradually. Hold the side rails until you get used to the speed and motion. Maintain good posture. Don't look down at the belt or drift sideways or backwards. Familiarize yourself with the stop mechanism in case you need it quickly.
<p style="text-align: center;">Stationary Bicycle</p> 	Provides aerobic benefits with less impact on knees and feet than a treadmill. Good for people with joint and skeletal problems. Recumbent models, where you sit as if on a chair, are often available.	Low-impact. A recumbent bike is more comfortable for many people, especially for those with back problems or large people who find the seat of an upright bike uncomfortable. It also works the hamstrings (at the back of the thigh) and buttocks more effectively.	Not weight-bearing; provides no upper-body exercise. Since fewer muscles are involved, you won't burn as many calories as on a treadmill or elliptical trainer. Can aggravate a knee problem if resistance is set too high.	Adjust seat height so your knees are only slightly bent when legs are extended. Your hips should not rock as you pedal. Sit straight, not hunched over. Use toe clips so you pull up as you pedal providing greater variety in muscle involvement.
<p style="text-align: center;">Stair Climber</p> 	Provides an excellent workout for hips, buttock and legs. Ladder-type machines also work the upper body.	Low-impact and weight-bearing, Good calorie-burner if you can stick to it. Good training for hikers and skiers. The climbing angle can be made steeper than on a treadmill or elliptical trainer.	Can be challenging and tiring, especially if it includes upper body-movement and you are not in good shape. Can be uncomfortable for those with knee problems.	Start slowly. Use for cross-training and shorter workouts. Don't lean on the rails or take mini-steps, which will reduce your workout. Maintain good posture. Keep feet flat for better balance.
<p style="text-align: center;">Rowing Machine</p> 	Provides a good workout that can help strengthen the back.	Done properly, rowing engages the arms, abdomen, back, thighs, hips, calves, and buttocks as you pull-a total body workout. Low-impact. Good training for swimmers.	Correct technique may be hard to master. Not weight-bearing. You may strain your lower back, especially if you lean too far forward. Can worsen shoulder and knee problems.	When starting out, get help from a trainer. Maintain a semi-erect posture without rounding your back; keep your grip relaxed. Aim for a smooth stroke.