

# Heart Rate Monitors 101:

## TAKING YOUR WORKOUTS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Universal remote controls, high-speed Internet, iPods—do any of these gadgets sound familiar? We are living in an age in which technology, efficiency, and time management seem to rule.

I admit it. I often look to technology to help me take things in my life to the next level. I use it to improve my ability to communicate, to run my business, and even to manage my personal fitness and training program. That's why one of my favorite tools is a heart rate monitor.

A heart rate monitor is one of the most effective tools you can use to get the most out of your workouts and take your fitness to the next level. Although it used to be considered a tool primarily for elite athletes, these days you'll run across ordinary people wearing heart rate monitors at the gym and an array of options available in the display case at your local sports shop.

So, what can a heart rate monitor do for you? Whether you are already competing in triathlons, training for your first 5K, or a weekend warrior, using a heart rate monitor turns guesses about your effort level into facts—meaning you train smarter, not harder. This virtual “coach-on-your-wrist” will help keep you motivated, accountable, and on track so that you can be sure that you are getting the most from every minute you put into your workouts. It's also an amazing experience to tune into your heart's health. This is something mostly hidden from us, but with a heart rate monitor you get to see your heart respond as you go faster or slower during your workouts. Importantly, you also get to follow the improvement of your cardio conditioning—as your increasingly good health shows up right on your wrist.

Let's talk about how a heart rate moni-

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tor works. Heart rate monitors can either be a one-piece or a two-piece wireless device with a chest strap (the “transmitter”) and a wristwatch (the “receiver”). I recommend a two-piece monitor, because the technology is generally accepted to be the most reliable. With the two-piece monitor, you place the strap on your chest underneath your clothing with the transmitter over your heart, and you wear the receiver on your wrist just as you would a wristwatch. You normally push a button on the watch to start the heart rate monitor transmitting your heartbeat, which appears as a number on the watch. Simple, right?

The next thing you need to do is to understand what the numbers on your heart rate monitor mean and how to use them effectively, so let's talk about heart rate-based training. The key to maximizing your workouts is to find the appropriate individualized target heart rate on which to base your workouts. One of the ways to figure this is to use something called “Perceived Exertion.” This means that while you are working out, you judge your effort level based on a range of 1 to 10. One is extremely easy and 10 is extremely hard. You want to figure out what your heart rate is when your Perceived Exertion is at approximately 8-8.5.

Another more scientific way to figure out what heart rate you should use as the basis for your workout is to determine your Anaerobic Threshold (AT). In simple terms, your AT is the heart rate at which you shift from being

able to talk to having trouble talking. Medically, this is the point at which lactic acid starts to accumulate in your muscles. There is a general formula to determine your AT based on your age but, to find your true AT, you should contact the director of personal training at a fitness center or gym and have someone on staff give you an AT test.

Confusing you with too much science isn't going to help you here—the only thing you need to know is that once you figure out your approximate Perceived Exertion goal or AT, you can use your heart rate monitor for precise training. Although there are a variety of heart rate-based workouts, I recommend that you use your monitor to help you start an interval training program. Interval training (pushing hard for a few minutes interspersed with short periods of rest) maximizes fitness by strengthening your heart and lungs, improving your rate of recovery, and promoting weight loss by increasing calorie burning and fat loss. You can read more about heart rate-based training and get a sample interval workout on the training page at [www.breakthroughHF.com](http://www.breakthroughHF.com).

Once you've committed to heart rate-based training, what features should you look for in a heart rate monitor? You will find that the price of monitors range from about \$50 all the way up to hundreds of dollars. When choosing one that is right for you, you'll want to consider the features and the quality of the monitor itself. Basic heart rate monitor features include ordi-

nary watch functions, heart rate monitoring including computing of your average heart rate, and a stop watch. Some of the higher end heart rate monitors can count the calories you burn, and others even offer the ability to download your numbers directly into your computer. If you are a swimmer, check to see that your monitor can be used underwater. Most everyday athletes are more than satisfied with a monitor in the \$100 range. Heart rate monitors run on batteries, and most are easily replaceable through a local grocery, drug, or hardware store.

Whichever model you choose, the most important thing is that you put it on, find a heart rate-based workout that works for you, and get out there! The great thing about this tool is that you can wear it no matter what you are doing—skiing, hiking, running, or walking the dog. Get in touch with your heart rate and you'll find that your good health and fitness will follow. Good luck and have fun! ▶▶



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[www.BreakthroughHF.com](http://www.BreakthroughHF.com)