

:: HotTips

Ellipticals



Versatile and effective, the elliptical allows for safe backward motion.

Running on Air

Elliptical trainers give you an intense burn without the hard impact. BY J.J. FLIZANES

Thanks to the elliptical trainer, even a broken bone won't halt your workout. I have a client who had to stop his treadmill training because of a broken toe. He didn't want to lose momentum in his program, and needed a workout that helped him burn calories without putting pressure on his injured appendage (talk about dedication!). The answer to his problem? Elliptical trainers.

Elliptical machines, or elliptical trainers, are well-known for having less impact on joints, especially the knees, than other cardio equipment and training on natural surfaces. The constant placement of your feet on the legs of the machine decreases the pounding on your ankles, knees, hips and spine. For anyone with injuries in these areas, this is a great thing.

It's important, however, to maximize your time on the elliptical trainer by using this great technology effectively. Here are some tips for doing this.

Make sure your feet fit. Some machines will have a wider stride than others, so notice what different brands look like and how they feel. If you're short, a machine with a smaller stride may feel better than one with a wide and long track. Maintain a natural, comfortable stride.

Work legs, not arms. You can place your hands on the machine where indicated, or use moving arms if the machine provides them. But keep the amount of body weight you support with your arms as light as possible to ensure that you are getting the best *cardio* workout. You will not be building muscle in your arms here — you can do that on the gym floor. Let your legs do most of the work.

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Don't slouch. Stand in an upright, neutral spine posture, and contract your abs to support your spine at all times.

Keep track of your toes. You may find that as you go faster, you want to be on your toes. This is fine as long as your calves and ankles can handle it, and you are working hard enough. If your toes cramp or your feet get tired, bend your knees more, keep your whole foot in contact with the platform at all times, and do not bounce. This will be much harder in terms of intensity, and will give your quads a great workout. You can also alternate between the two.

Try moving backward. This is one of the only machines you can go backward on safely, so take advantage. I like to go backward because new motions stimulate new motor patterns that may use different muscle fibers.

Don't be afraid of resistance. I found that my heart rate did not go very high when I was moving quickly but with little resistance. When I use this machine, I go backward slowly with a lot of resistance.

Use a heart-rate monitor. This is the most important factor in all cardio to ensure your efficiency of burning calories, and not reaching a plateau as you become more fit. ■

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finding your target heart rate

:: First, determine your maximum heart rate, which is simply 220 minus your age. Then, for fat-burning capacity, train 60%–70% of this maximum rate. For cardio, work to achieve 70%–80% of your maximum heart rate.