

The Difference Between Aerobic and Anaerobic Exercises

Many people mistakenly believe that all vigorous forms of exercise are aerobic in nature. However, some forms of vigorous exercise are actually anaerobic, and have a very different effect on the body. If you're just getting started on an exercise regimen, this information will help you sort out the difference between the two and tailor your workouts accordingly. So exactly what is the definition of aerobic exercise? Aerobic means "with oxygen," where anaerobic is "without oxygen." No, that doesn't entail holding your breath while exercising! Rather, it refers to cellular tissues producing energy without having to rely on oxygen availability. Alternatively, you may have guessed that aerobic exercise requires large supplies of oxygen to generate energy. The fundamental difference between aerobic and anaerobic exercises is that simple. A more detailed definition is that during aerobic exercise, activity is so sustained that it requires large amounts of oxygen. The muscles utilize oxygen to burn fat and glucose to manufacture adenosine triphosphate (ATP) - the basic energy vehicle for all cells in the body. During the initial stages of aerobic exercise, glycogen is transformed into glucose. If glucose stores become depleted, fat is metabolized as fuel. It's interesting to note that "runner's high" occurs when muscles have exhausted their immediate glycogen stores and begin relying only on oxygen, which releases endorphins in the brain. During anaerobic exercise, the muscles being used rely on energy-producing processes that don't require large amounts of oxygen. Instead, the body metabolizes muscle glycogen to produce power. Glycogen is supplied by blood sugar, which is manufactured by the liver from dietary amino acids and carbohydrates--whole grain, of course! Anaerobic exercise is so fast and brief that it doesn't have time to rely on oxygen, so glycogen is used. Some people mistakenly believe that aerobic exercise makes you small and weak. However, it actually tones muscle throughout your body and burns fat. This will make you look good in your bathing suit--not to mention your birthday suit! The effects that aerobic activity has on your body are not merely cosmetic - there are numerous health bonuses, such as:

- Improved circulation and lower blood pressure
 - Increased lung capacity through stronger respiratory muscles
 - A stronger heart, which boosts pumping efficiency and lowers the resting heart rate
 - Increased red blood cell count, which transports oxygen more efficiently throughout the entire body
 - Reduced risk of cardiovascular disease
- The effects that anaerobic exercise has on your body involves being able to deliver powerful performance on demand. That comes in handy when sprinting to the finish line, or making a break to score after stealing the ball. Muscles that are anaerobically trained develop differently, which boosts their performance in brief, high-intensity situations. Benefits include:
- Stronger bones
 - Reduced muscle atrophy with age
 - Increased speed and power
 - Increased muscle strength and mass
- It's important to understand the different types of exercises that produce an aerobic vs. anaerobic effect.

Anaerobic benefits are produced by brief, high-intensity activities, while in the aerobic zone, effort is moderate with a steady heart rate. Specific types of anaerobic exercise include tennis, weight lifting, sprinting and jumping. If you'd prefer not to frequent a gym, weight lifting can be performed in the comfort of your own home. A few dumb-bells, a weight bench and medicine ball are all you need. Some good aerobic exercises are walking, running, swimming, cycling, cross-country skiing and rowing. Fortunately, you can do aerobic exercises at home: riding an exercise bike, walking on a treadmill, or following an exercise video - the choices are virtually endless. This is particularly helpful if it's rainy or drastically cold outdoors. Also, depending on where you live, going snow-shoeing, hiking or kayaking is possible without ever having to step foot in the car! Combining aerobic and anaerobic exercise is essential to maintaining overall balanced fitness. While most associate getting into shape with aerobic activities, anaerobic exercise is a beneficial complement to aerobic exercise. For example, weight lifting is a great way to add even more tone and definition beyond what aerobic training provides. Be sure to check with your physician before beginning any exercise regimen. Also, it's very important to begin any exercise program slowly. Many people overdo it and lose motivation or worse yet, sustain injury. You may experience a little soreness the day after working out in the beginning; but if you are so sore that you can only work out one or two times per week it is counter-productive. Make exercise a healthy habit by doing a little every day; you can increase the intensity as you build endurance and strength over time. Of course, a daily exercise routine is just one factor in the equation for optimum health. You should also enjoy a nutritious and delicious diet, get eight hours of sleep every night, say no habits such as smoking and excessive drinking, and make sure you get the full spectrum of vitamins and minerals that your body needs to look and feel its best.

About the Author

Explores the role of nutrition and exercise treatments for scoliosis. Covers recent research linking spinal curvature to osteoporosis.

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