



What's Better For Weight Loss, Running Far or Running Fast?

by [Kevin Gray](#)

December 20, 2019

There's no one-size-fits-all strategy to weight loss, but if you [want to lose weight](#), you've got to burn more calories than you consume. Doing so can take many forms, from specific diets to a variety of exercise regimens, including strength training, high-intensity interval training and steady-state cardio. So, you have many options at your disposal — you've just got to find what's right for you.

If [running is part of your weight-loss strategy](#), you might choose to engage in slower, longer runs or faster, shorter runs. Both can be effective. But which will be the most effective in meeting your goals?

RUNNING FAR TO LOSE WEIGHT

If you're running long distances, you're likely performing steady-state cardio, which is a lower intensity exercise that can be performed for a long time. In this case, your [heart rate](#) stays in a moderate work zone, not experiencing the intense highs and lows it would during, for example, [sprint training](#).

“[Long-distance runs](#) are great for building up your endurance and improving overall cardiovascular health,” says Chris Coggins, a running coach. “If you're training for an event like a 5K or a half-marathon, most of your training will be at a steady-state pace. You will burn fewer calories per minute, but you're working for more minutes, so the total calorie burn can really add up.” He mentions that slower runs are also easier on your joints, so they have the added benefit of allowing you to recover more quickly between runs.

However, as healthy as long, slow jogs can be, they might result in [plateaus](#). As your body adapts to the exercise, it won't feel as challenged and it may burn fewer calories for the same level of work. “Increasing distance is one way to break through plateaus, but you can only run so far,” says Coggins. “Eventually, your body will become accustomed to a particular distance, and your weight loss may plateau.”

RUNNING FAST TO LOSE WEIGHT

The faster you run, the more calories you burn. And the more calories you burn, the more weight you can lose. That math is easy enough, but there's more to the story.

If you're able to increase your speed over a certain duration, then your calorie burn increases significantly, says Coggins. Consider the following example:

If you weigh 150 pounds and run 6 miles per hour (a 10-minute mile pace), you can burn 680 calories in one hour according to the MyFitnessPal exercise calculator. If you increase your pace to 8 miles per hour (a 7.5-minute mile), you can burn 919 calories in the same amount of time.



That said, speeding up isn't feasible for everyone. Unless you're a serious runner, maintaining a quicker pace for a long duration likely isn't in the cards — at least not right away. If you'd like to increase your speed, you'll need to decrease duration.

Now, if you were to run that 8 mile-per-hour pace for 30 minutes, you would burn 459 calories. That's fewer than you'd burn from the longer, slower run. Stop here, and it would be easy to give steady-state cardio the victory. But, again, there's more to consider.

First, shorter runs are easier to fit into busy days, so you might be more likely to do the shorter, more intense workout than the longer, less intense workout. Second, high-intensity exercise helps you achieve the coveted [“afterburn effect.”](#)

Also known as [EPOC](#), or [“excess post-exercise oxygen consumption,”](#) the afterburn is the amount of oxygen required to return the body to its pre-exercise state. In other words, you'll keep burning calories even after exercise has ended. It's difficult to calculate the exact impact, but [an Australian study shows](#) a 6–15% increase in the hours following a high-intensity workout.

SO, WHICH IS BEST?

“It's kind of a trick question, because ideally you should be doing both,” says Coggins. “High-intensity runs are great for torching calories, and they give you that afterburn effect. But slower runs help you build endurance, burn fat and are better for recovery.”

If you're serious about losing weight and are healthy enough for high-intensity exercise, he recommends sprint intervals. Switch up the speed and distance of the intervals, and you'll keep your body guessing to avoid plateaus. Then do slower jogs or even take some nice, long walks for active recovery days. The two-pronged approach offers the most benefits long term.

“Any type of exercise can help you lose weight, just don't become too reliant on any one thing,” says Coggins. Mix things up by running, jogging, walking, lifting weights and doing whatever else gets you up and moving. Ultimately, regular activity is what's going to help you achieve lasting weight loss.