Determining Intensity: Talk Test and Perceived Exertion

One of the most important features of a cardiovascular workout is to try to reach an appropriate heart rate.

There are three common ways to measure the intensity of training:

1. talk test
2. using the Rate of Perceived Exertion method to measure intensity
3. measuring heart rate and calculating the appropriate training zone or Target Heart Rate Zone that represents 50%–85% of the maximum heart rate

Talk Test The talk test measures your ability to carry on a conversation while doing physical activity or exercising. This method is often used to monitor aerobic intensity.

If you are able to talk effortlessly, you may be working below your target heart rate zone. If you are able to talk with someone with some slight effort during a workout, you are probably in your target heart rate zone. If talking is very difficult or impossible, you may be overdoing it.

Perceived Exertion The Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE) is another way of estimating an activity’s intensity and does not require any special equipment or measurement technique. Essentially, an individual rates the exercise intensity on a scale of 6–20 (see Figure 3.3). This method determines exercise intensity across a variety of populations and settings.

The participant should try to exercise at an intensity below 17, because this is aerobic exercise for most people. Target ranges of 10–14 are recommended for those beginning exercise, while a range of 12–16 is for moderate to hard intensity. Although using the RPE is not as useful to determine exercise intensity as heart rate, it does provide good feedback.
Talk Test and Rate of Perceived Exertion Activity

The purpose of this activity is to estimate the intensity of your workout by using the talk test and rate of perceived exertion method. At what point of your exercise session does talking become difficult? A heart rate monitor will be used to provide accurate information to use as a comparison. Use a treadmill if available since you can control the pace of your jog and slowly increase.

In this activity, you will work with a partner who can carry on a conversation with you and take notes. You will start with a slow jog and increase the speed (intensity) every minute by jogging a little faster and maintaining that new pace for that minute. As you are jogging, you will recite the alphabet, sing a song, or try to carry on a constant conversation with your partner.
You want to continue increasing the speed every minute until you feel that you cannot carry on a normal conversation. At that point, begin to slow down and complete a slow walk (until your heart rate is below 125) as part of a cool-down recovery phase. Finish by stretching. At the end of every minute, your partner will note information about how hard it was for you to carry on a normal conversation. They will also show you the Chart of Perceived Exertion for you to give a rating of “how hard” you feel you are working. If a treadmill was used, your partner will also note your speed (how many miles per hour).

Partner will record information. Circle the heart rates in which you are working 50%–85% of your own THR.

Target Heart Rate Zone 50% = ____________ to 85% = ____________

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<th>Heart Rate</th>
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<th>Breathing</th>
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Cardiovascular Fitness—Activity 2

How many minutes did it take to get into your own Target Heart Rate Zone? Describe your breathing and your RPE at that point.

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How many minutes did it take to get to the upper end of your Target Heart Rate Zone? Describe your breathing at that point.

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

How many minutes were you in your own Target Heart Rate Zone? How did your breathing change as you went from the lower end of your zone to the upper end of your zone?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

How many minutes were you exercising until talking became too difficult to carry on a normal conversation? Were you in or out of your Target Heart Rate Zone?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

Evaluation

1. Do you feel you could use the talk test or RPE as indicators of heart rate intensity? Explain.

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

2. What is the relationship between your heart rate pulse, breathing, RPE, and Target Heart Rate Zone?

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