

In this article you'll learn what Zone 2 is, how it can help you, and how you can implement it into your personal plan to help you make the most out of your cardio sessions.

[Training](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workout-routines) and living a fitness-based lifestyle is a serious commitment. So, when you take that time to exercise, you want to know that the approach you’re using is one that will work, especially with [cardio](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/cardio).

There are several approaches to consider, and one has received a lot of attention due of its effectiveness as well as the simplicity of applying it to your workout regimen. I’m talking about Zone 2 training.

If this is new to you, then consider this your introductory course. We’ll cover what Zone 2 is, how it can help you, back it up with science, and then help you implement it into your personal plan so you can make the most out of your cardio.

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What is Zone 2?

Zone 2 training is exercise that calls for the effort to be determined by your [heart rate](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/understanding-heart-rate-variability). If you’ve ever been in a spin class or aerobics studio, then you may have seen a chart that shows six heart rate zones that you could be in based on the level of activity you’re performing.

As rough examples, Zone 1 could be you sitting on the couch relaxing, while Zone 6 is you is the absolute highest intensity and output you can give, such as an all-out [sprint](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/sprinting-for-lifters) or pedaling a bike as hard and fast as you possibly can.

According to experts, Zone 2 training is a level in which the body will use fat and oxygen as its source of energy instead of carbohydrates. It isn’t very taxing on the body, either. Most people should be able to get into Zone 2 and have a productive session without feeling exhausted. Various sources have defined Zone 2’s heart rate range as between 60 and 70 percent of your max heart rate.



Benefits of Zone 2

The concept of training in Zone 2 may be a strange one for some athletes and trainees because it’s not often we work in this range. Activities such as [weight training](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/8-week-super-strength-workout) or yoga won’t move you past Zone 1, while classes, [sports](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/sports), and other intense activities may have you in Zones 3, 4, and 5.

Even though you may not be used to this level of training, there are several benefits to start.

Building an Aerobic Foundation

If you were to look at your body as a building, the aerobic capacity could be considered a big part of the foundation. Training in Zone 2 can help you lay that foundation in a slow and calculated way. Taking the time to work on improving your fitness and training in Zone 2 with a lower heart rate can provide more bricks to that foundation.

In other words, your capacity to work harder and get more results can be improved. So, if you’re in a situation that calls for you to work or [train harder](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/10-week-mass-building-program.html), such as a race or HIIT class, then you’ll be better prepared for that level of work, and you can get more results from it.

Lowers Resting Heart Rate

That ability to do more work and train in a higher zone will have another effect – it can and will help you lower your resting heart rate. That is important because a lower resting heart rate is a sign of improved cardiovascular health. Yes, looking good is important for many of us, but at the end of the day, we should all be in this for better quality and quantity of life. Zone 2 can help with that end goal.

Better Recovery

Zone 2 training can help increase [oxygen](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/do-elevation-masks-work) capacity both during and after exercise. One study determined that training in Zone 2 did, in fact, show very positive signs in oxygen intake compared to Zone 1.1 Furthermore, you can improve the body’s ability to flush out more lactic acid.

For you [beginners](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/beginner) out there, lactic acid is what causes [Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/reduce-doms-muscle-soreness), that soreness and pain you may feel for a couple of days after a hard workout. That means you can [recover](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/defeating-doms-5-suggestions) quicker and be able to get back into the weight room or play your sport of choice again sooner with less negative impact on your performance. Leg days won’t be quite as scary if you can work Zone 2 into your programs.

Improve Insulin Sensitivity

All of the above benefits lead to yet another benefit. Your body will be better able to transfer glycogen into the muscles for fuel. As a result, your body will also be better able to [process carbohydrates](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/carbs-arent-making-you-fat) and regulate insulin levels.2 Any strength athlete will benefit from that kind of improvement.

Related: [Optimizing Insulin Sensitivity for Muscle Gain and Fat Loss](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/insulin-sensitivity-muscle-gain-fat-loss)



How to Calculate Zone 2

Now, that you know what Zone 2 is, how it works, and why you should start applying it, the next question on your mind may be, “how do I apply it?”

There are two ways to add Zone 2 into your training – by using a heart rate monitor and by determining [Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE)](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/articles/auto-regulation-percentage-based-training). Let’s go ahead and knock out the simple way first.

RPE – If you want to simply test this out for yourself today, then consider your effort on a scale of 1-10. One is sitting around, doing very little, while 10 is you running for your life or attempting a big lift with a lot of money on the line.

Perform your cardio with a RPE level of 3. This could be walking at a moderate pace, doing an average bike ride without hills, or basic aerobics without pushing yourself. An RPE of 3 is likely to get you in that Zone 2 heart rate.

Monitor – Some fitness-minded people like numbers and hard evidence, so we got you covered for that as well. The first thing you’re going to do is buy a heart rate monitor because you’ll need it. You can get one online or at most sporting goods stores.

Next, you’re going to determine your absolute max heart rate. Get a calculator for this part. The standard for this is to take the number 220 and subtract your age. So, for a 30-year-old person, that would be 190 beats per minute (BPM). *220-30=190*

Next, you will take that max heart rate number and calculate 60 percent and 70 percent. Using our 30-year-old as the example again, that would be 60-70 percent of 190, which is a range of 114 to 133.

Once you have those numbers, hook up your monitor and start doing cardio. Remember that you shouldn’t have to put that much effort into it. It can be any of the activities mentioned above, or you could use this guideline while doing other activities such as yard work. If you fall under that 60 percent number, pick up the pace. If you break 70 percent, slow down.



How to Add Zone 2 Into Training

The way you add Zone 2 into your program depends on your level of fitness as well as your schedule. [Beginners](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/12-week-beginners-training-routine.html) may want to implement shorter sessions until they get used to training, then they can add time to it. The more [advanced](https://www.muscleandstrength.com/workouts/advanced-bodybuilder-workout.html) you are, the more time you can perform Zone 2. A good time range based on fitness levels can be seen below.

* Beginners – 20-30 minutes
* Intermediate – 30-40 minutes
* Advanced – 40-60 minutes

If your schedule doesn’t allow you to do an hour straight of cardio, then break it up into two sessions – one in the morning and the other after a workout as an example. Make sure to consider your current fitness level as well.

If you’re not in the best cardio shape, then a fast walk may be all it takes to get into Zone 2. If you’re in great cardio shape already, then you might have to put in more effort to reach that zone. Working Zone 2 workouts into your program once to three times a week should be enough to help you make progress in aerobic capacity and fat loss.

Conclusion

In an age where more appears to be better, and going harder is what gets the most attention, Zone 2 training is quite different and may appear to be inferior on the surface. However, learning more about it and applying it can prove that it is a worthwhile tool to have in the toolbox that is your personal fitness success. The more options you have, the better your chances of success are, and Zone 2 can be a great option to consider when it comes to your next training program.