

LOW STRESS, HIGH RESULTS

It's the Goldilocks of workouts: high-intensity, low-impact training (HILIT) is the solution for those asking, 'How can I get an effective workout without putting too much strain on my body?'

BY CHARIS TORRANCE



Actress-turned-personal-trainer Carol Behane demonstrates how a rowing machine makes for an effective HILIT workout. It gets the heart pumping but is gentle on the joints.

Are you ready to break a sweat without busting your joints? Look no further than high-intensity, low-impact training (HILIT), a burgeoning fitness trend that offers the best of both worlds: the benefits of high-intensity workouts without the joint stress often associated with traditional high-impact exercises.

We chatted to personal trainer and sports massage therapist Carol Behane about the ups and downs (but mostly ups) of HILIT.

'During low-impact training, the heart rate increases gradually and tends to fluctuate rather than remaining elevated for extended periods,' Carol says. When we combine it with high-intensity interval training, you get the

vigorous effort characteristic of high-intensity interval training (HIIT) with low-impact movements. 'The essence of HILIT is to elevate the heart rate and engage multiple muscle groups without placing undue stress on the joints.'

This makes HILIT accessible and safe for people of all ages and fitness levels.

5 BENEFITS OF HILIT

1 Joint-friendly workouts

Traditional high-intensity workouts often involve running, jumping and other high-impact activities that can be hard on the joints. HILIT avoids these movements, reducing the risk of joint pain and long-term damage. 'Many of my clients, especially older adults or those with joint issues, have found HILIT to be a game-changer,' Carol says. 'It allows them to push their limits without the fear of injury.'

2 Efficient calorie burning

Don't let the 'low-impact' part fool you; HILIT can burn a significant number of calories in a short period. The high-intensity nature of the workouts ensures that the heart rate remains elevated. 'It's incredible how much you can achieve in a short HILIT session,' Carol says.

3 Improved heart health

HILIT workouts push the cardiovascular system without overloading it. Regular participation in HILIT can improve heart health and enhance lung capacity. A study published in the *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness* examined the effects of HIIT on cardiovascular health indicators such as VO_2 max (maximal oxygen uptake) and heart rate variability. The researchers found that participants who engaged in HIIT experienced improvements in these indicators, which are crucial for cardiovascular fitness.

4 Muscle strength and endurance

Many HILIT exercises incorporate resistance training, which helps to build muscle strength and

endurance. A study published in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* that investigated the impact of HIIT on muscle adaptations showed that participants who engaged in HIIT sessions demonstrated significant improvements in muscle strength and endurance compared to those in the control group.

This not only enhances physical performance but also increases metabolic rate, helping to manage weight long-term. 'Strength training within HILIT routines helps build muscle mass, which is essential for metabolism and overall fitness,' Carol says.

5 Flexibility and balance

Low-impact exercises often require a focus on controlled movements, which can improve flexibility and balance. These attributes are crucial for overall functional fitness and injury prevention.

A study published in the *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine* that examined the impact of balance training on injury prevention among athletes found that participants who did regular balance exercises had reduced incidences of lower extremity injuries such as ankle sprains and knee injuries.

HILIT EXERCISES

HILIT focuses on elevating the heart rate through intervals of intense effort followed by periods of lower intensity or rest, and the emphasis is on smooth, controlled movements. To enhance muscular strength and endurance, HILIT routines often incorporate elements of resistance

Battle ropes offer a vigorous workout that boosts heart rate and builds strength without stressing the joints, making them ideal for intense, low-impact fitness.



training, and can be customised to suit various fitness levels, from beginner to advanced athlete.

Carol suggests the following exercises to get you started:

CYCLING: Cycling is a quintessential HILIT exercise. It provides a high-intensity cardiovascular workout while being gentle on the joints. Whether using a stationary bike or cycling outdoors, this activity can be tailored to various fitness levels by adjusting the resistance and speed.

ROWING: Rowing machines offer a full-body workout that targets the legs, core and upper body. The smooth gliding motion of rowing minimises joint impact while maximising cardiovascular and muscular engagement.

WATER AEROBICS: Swimming and water aerobics are excellent low-impact exercises that provide a total-body workout. The water supports the body, reducing strain on the joints while offering resistance to build strength and endurance.

STRENGTH TRAINING WITH

RESISTANCE BANDS: Resistance bands are versatile tools that can provide a challenging workout without the need for heavy weights. They are particularly useful for maintaining low-impact, high-intensity workouts that strengthen and tone muscles.

ELLIPTICAL TRAINING: Elliptical machines mimic the motion of running but without the impact. They engage the lower body while also allowing for arm movement if equipped with handles, providing a comprehensive workout.

EXERCISE

Planking is a low-impact exercise that simultaneously strengthens and stabilises the core, back and shoulders.

preserve muscle elasticity and supports overall muscle health.'

Listen to your body

Pay attention to your body as you're working out. If you experience pain (as opposed to typical muscle fatigue), stop the exercise and consult a healthcare professional if necessary.

Stay hydrated

Drinking enough water is essential for maintaining performance and preventing dehydration, especially during high-intensity workouts.

Use proper form

Using correct form is crucial to ensure you are getting the most out of each exercise and to prevent injuries. If you're unsure, consider working with a fitness professional or joining a class.

Don't fall for 'fitfluencers'

In the age of social media, Carol cautions against slavishly following fitness influencers or professionals online. 'Not all content may showcase proper technique, and edited videos can be misleading, potentially leading to injuries if exercises are performed incorrectly or excessively.'

Some exercises seen on platforms like YouTube and TikTok may prioritise aesthetics over effectiveness, she says. Which is why it's always safer to learn from an instructor or personal trainer who can demonstrate correct form and ensure safe exercise and fitness progress.

Now go forth, HILIT warrior! Your joints, heart and waistline will thank you. ❖

GETTING STARTED

Before you dive in, follow these steps to set yourself up for success:

1 ASSESS YOUR FITNESS LEVEL

First, if you're pregnant, undergoing recovery from any injury or dealing with any health concerns, consult your doctor. Once you've been given the all-clear, assess your current fitness level. This will help you choose appropriate exercises and determine the intensity and duration of your workouts. 'Understanding your starting point is crucial,' Carol says. 'It allows you to tailor your routine to your needs and avoid overtraining.'

2 SET CLEAR GOALS

Define what you want to achieve with your HILIT workouts, whether it's weight loss, increased muscle strength or improved cardiovascular health. Having clear, achievable goals and tracking your progress will help you stay motivated.

3 CHOOSE THE RIGHT EXERCISES

Select exercises that you enjoy and that suit your fitness level. Incorporate a mix of cardiovascular and strength training activities to ensure a well-rounded workout. Enjoyment is key to sustainability, so pick exercises that you will look forward to doing.

4 MONITOR YOUR PROGRESS

Keep track of your workouts and progress. Note how you feel during and after each session, and adjust the intensity and duration as needed. Regularly reviewing your progress is a great way to keep on track, and it allows you to see whether you need to make any adjustments to your workout regime.

5 STICK WITH IT

Many people expect immediate results when they first join a gym, but it's a journey. 'Start slowly and build up gradually,' Carol says. 'Don't feel discouraged if you don't see results immediately.' Remember that consistency is key. If you maintain good eating habits and stick with your training, you will see results over time.

6 REST

Carol suggests doing HILIT three to four times a week. 'It's important to remember that rest is also a crucial part of exercising,' she says. 'Your body needs time to recover, so make sure to include rest days in your routine.'

SAFETY TIPS

To ensure a safe and effective HILIT workout, follow these tips:

Warm up and cool down

People hear 'low-impact' and then they assume they don't need to warm up before exercising, Carol says. 'This could lead to muscle tears, hamstring injuries or other damage. It's a common misconception, even among professionals.'

Neglecting to stretch after exercise is also detrimental. 'During exercise, muscles undergo micro-tears, which, when healed, can lead to reduced muscle length if not properly stretched. Stretching helps to