



## Heart Rate Monitors

*Adapted with permission from article by Cheryl Hyde, M.S. of FitLinxx*

Several years ago, I was teaching fitness classes, working out on a cross-trainer, and biking or walking five to six days a week, 30 to 60 minutes at a time. Given this regimen, I could not understand why I was not feeling stronger, losing body fat or achieving peak cardiovascular condition. A friend lent me her heart rate monitor for a week. At first, I used it somewhat skeptically. **I'd always thought heart rate monitors were only for elite athletes.** Wow, was I wrong!

After several days of using the monitor, I was shocked to discover I had actually been over-training - my workouts were raising my heart rate much higher than my training range suggested it should be. It was a wake-up call for me: no matter how educated I was about exercise intensity, I was sabotaging my fitness goals by not knowing my working heart rate.

I bought my own heart rate monitor and started using it every time I worked out aerobically. I modified my workouts so I was staying in my aerobic range, and was soon exercising at an intensity that allowed me to meet my goals. I lost the body fat I wanted to lose. My clothes fit better, my muscles felt stronger and my resting heart rate decreased. I felt great. All these benefits were achieved within a few months. In addition, **I discovered the relationship between my heart rate and perceived exertion.** Before using the heart rate monitor, I perceived my workouts as easier than they actually were. Now that I'm living proof of its value, I have thanked my friend many, many times for insisting that I try her little gadget.

You can own a heart rate monitor for as little as \$50 for a "no-frills" version to \$400 or more for one with all the bells and whistles. **The basic models are impressively accurate.** When compiling data for my master's thesis, I compared a widely available commercial heart rate monitor with a 12-lead electrocardiogram (ECG, an electrical imprint of heart activity recorded on a monitor screen). I found the monitor to be nearly as **accurate as the ECG** used by researchers and physicians, and **much easier to use.**

The most basic models do just what their name implies - they monitor your heart rate.

Beyond that, you've got a **range of features** from which to choose, including lap counters, alarms, stop watches, back-lighting, simultaneous multiple readouts, computer interfaces, ability to calculate recovery heart rate and night vision. You may or may not need any of these features, but **one function worth looking for is programmability.** Look for programmable types that allowed you to load in your minimum and maximum training target heart rates, and then sound an alarm if you go below or above your zone.

I have found that a basic unit costing around \$50 is all that most people need. However, if you are training for major competitions or events, you may find some or all of the advanced features to be worth the extra investment. Heart rate monitors may be purchased at sporting goods stores and many discount stores. You also can order them online, but bear in mind that if you're just beginning, you may appreciate having a sales clerk's help in learning to use the monitor and making sure you're comfortable with it.