

## Stadium Workouts

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The thought of an exercise session lasting an hour or more has most people skipping the gym all together in favor of an hour on the couch watching American Idol. The truth is that long-duration workouts are no longer feasible in today's fast-paced world, nor do most have the psychological capacity to endure them day after day. Enter one of the best workouts for producing noticeable results in a fraction of the time: stair climbing. Also known as "running stadiums," this high-intensity workout is not only much more psychologically satisfying when a 150-lb woman can burn up to 175 calories in only 10 minutes, but maximizes after-burn so that you can continue burning calories later into the day, perhaps even while watching American Idol.

### Running stairs is ideal cardiovascular exercise

Because running stadiums is so intense, short workouts work just as well, if not better than longer, slower workouts. And by nature, running stairs is an innate interval-training workout. Intervals alternate high-intensity bouts (running *up* the stairs) with low-intensity recovery periods (walking back *down* the stairs). This varying of high and low intensities several times within the same workout is superior for several reasons.

First, it trains *heart rate recovery*, or the ability of the heart rate to come down quickly after exercise. A delay in heart rate recovery is a powerful predictor of overall mortality and increased risk for cardiac incident (N Eng J Med 1999;341:1351-7). The practice of bringing the heart rate up and back down several times throughout a single exercise bout trains the heart to recover faster and is essentially like toning the heart muscle. Steady-state aerobic exercise, such as jogging, does not do this, since it only requires the heart rate to come up once at the start of exercise and back down once at the end of the workout.

Second, interval training increases oxygen debt or excess post-exercise oxygen consumption (EPOC). Think about how it feels to simply walk up a large flight of steps. You will be breathing the hardest at the top, right? This is because your cardiovascular system has to play catch-up following the oxygen debt you have created; a catch-up that lasts long after you are done climbing the stairs. This mini-example of oxygen debt is essentially what is happening every time you complete an intense exercise interval. Your heart rate spikes, your breathing accelerates, your lungs burn and your muscles tire, each of which requires the body using up calories. Interval training using stairs creates this metabolic effect over and over throughout a single workout, effectively exponentiating caloric burn long after the workout is over.

Finally, stair climbing is one of the best cardiovascular activities for muscular endurance and shaping. Especially long strides up the stairs (like skipping steps) mimic the movement of a lunge, first stretching the glutes, quads and hamstrings, and then contracting all 3 muscles together in one big muscular effort to reach for the next step. If done right, this movement creates a muscular burn in the glutes, quads and hamstrings that cannot be generated in most other cardio activities.

### **How to run stadiums**

This type of exercise can be done using any staircase anywhere. However, finding a stadium to us allows for more variety in the workout and the ability to incorporate other resistance training exercises too. Find a stadium, perhaps at the local high school track, that has aisles with at least 20 steps. Make sure you warm-up with a few laps around the track and some dynamic stretches like high-knees, straight-leg kicks and walking lunges. Incorporate these no-equipment-needed stadium workouts once or twice a week for optimal results:

#### **Stadium Workout #1: 10 minute “Figure-8s”**

You will need 3 adjacent aisles for this workout.

Begin at the bottom of aisle 1 and sprint, taking 2 steps at a time, to the top

Jog across the top to aisle 2, walk down aisle 2

Jog across the bottom to aisle 3 and sprint, taking 2 steps at a time, to the top

Jog across the top to aisle 2, walk down aisle 2

Jog across the bottom to aisle 1, and repeat the whole cycle again

Repeat figure-8 cycle until 10 minutes is up.

Remember to sprint as hard as possible up the stairs and walk as slow as possible down the stairs to recover, in effect creating very intense “highs” and really restful “lows.”

#### **Stadium Workout #2: 15-minute “Squares”**

You will need 2 adjacent aisles for this workout.

Begin at the bottom of aisle 1 and sprint, taking 2 steps at a time, to the top

Perform walking lunges across the top until you get to the top of aisle 2

Walk down aisle 2.

At the bottom, perform 10 straight-leg incline push-ups using the steps

Jog across the bottom until you are at the start of aisle 1 again.

Repeat this “square” until 15 minutes is up

On the walking lunges, go slow and deep, focusing on quality of the lunge, rather than trying to move as fast as possible. Your walk down the stairs is your recovery.

#### **Stadium Workout #3: 20-minute Leg-blasting circuit**

You will only need 1 aisle for this workout.

Begin at the bottom of the aisle, and sprint, taking 2 steps at a time, to the top

At the top, do 10 fast squats, 10 pulsing squats, 10 squat jumps

Walk back down the steps

Do 10 squat thrusts at the bottom

Repeat the circuit until 20 minutes is up

If you do this right, your legs should be burning throughout the workout. Shake them out as needed.