

• By Liam Scopes

Your new 4-minute workout

Got 4 minutes? Then you've got time for a workout. With a consistent commitment a few times a week, this protocol will bring you great results.



Welcome to spring. It's time to think about revitalising your energy levels and kicking back into a regular exercise routine (for those of us who succumbed to the cold, dark, mornings and evenings over winter). If the thought of this makes you cringe, don't give up just yet, because we've got a great solution for you. We're about to present a very efficient workout that has the potential to give even greater results than your typical trudge around the block and take less time! Introducing ... Tabata training.

Tabata what?

The Tabata protocol is a form of High-Intensity Interval Training (or HIIT) that alternates short bursts of high intensity anaerobic training followed by even shorter recovery periods.

It was originally devised by Irisawa Koichi, the head coach of the Japanese Speed Skating team in the 1990s, whose unusual training technique of short bursts with even shorter rest periods not only increased short term explosive strength but also long term endurance.

Izumu Tabata, a coach under Koichi, was asked to analyse the effectiveness of the training method and published his findings in the 1996 journal "Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise". Dr Tabata found that this technique resulted in a "very fast increase in VO2 max" (which is a measure of fitness), as well as improvements in anaerobic capacity (sprint, speed and power).

For whatever reason, Tabata's name became associated with the workout, rather than Koichi, but regardless of who it's named after, the research shows the protocol works. In fact the group of people who did a 4-minute Tabata session 5 times per week showed more improvement than a control group who did 1 hour of steady training 5 times a week, over the course of 6 weeks.

In other words ...

the people who did a total of **120** minutes exercise over **6** weeks had **MORE** improvements than those who did **1800** minutes!

So what is a Tabata workout?

The protocol for this workout is really easy: 20 seconds of maximum effort, followed by 10 seconds of rest, repeated 8 times (for a total of 4 minutes).

20 SECONDS OF WORK
10 SECONDS OF RECOVERY
4 MINUTES OF INTENSITY
LIFETIME OF STRENGTH

The key is going hard enough in the 20 second effort, and then as easy as possible for the 10 seconds of recovery. How hard is hard? Dr Tabata explains it as "if you feel OK after the session you have not done it right!

The first three sessions should be easy and the last two should feel impossibly hard." It can also be described as a feeling of "jelly-legs" during the final couple of efforts. So basically by the time you have finished you should feel pretty shattered, but remember it's all worth it for the efficient routine and quick results.

Tabata training not only improves fitness, but also helps build muscle and enables fat burning for several hours following the workout by increasing metabolic rate. All this means the 4 minutes of training equates to more bang for your buck!



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Another bonus of Tabata training is that it can be done with a number of different exercises. An indoor bike is ideal (and is how Dr Tabata conducted his research), but a rowing machine or running sprints are other options, as are weight bearing exercises such as burpees, squat jumps, skipping or star jumps.



To get the best out of your Tabata workout

- Make sure your body is ready. Warm-up properly – get a sweat on and include a few easy repeats of the exercise you’ll be doing in the workout (e.g. some press-ups, burpees, fast spinning on the bike etc).
- Do your Tabata workout in the morning to raise your metabolism, and burn more energy throughout the day.
- Alternate exercises during the workout to add some variety (e.g. burpees for the first 20 seconds, alternated with star jumps for the other 20 seconds).
- Download a good Tabata timer app (e.g. Tabata Pro or Tabata Stopwatch).
- Start off easy. Treat your first few Tabata workouts as practice as your body gets used to the movements involved and higher intensities.

Important things to remember:

- 1 Scale the workout to your level of fitness. Not everyone will be able to start off with sprints on a bike or burpees. If a fast walk up a hill is going to get you breathing hard and your heart rate elevated, then this is the level where you should begin.
- 2 The Tabata training protocol only works if you are not already fatigued. That means it is best to do it as a stand-alone workout (i.e. don’t combine it with a weights sessions, or a long run etc.) It is most effective if you have an easy warm-up, do the Tabata session, then finish with an easy warm-down.
- 3 Aim for 3-4 times per week maximum. Any more than this and you’ll be compromising the point above, and won’t recover properly for next time.
- 4 Tabata, HIIT and all interval sessions are only effective if you ensure there is significant difference between the effort (i.e. hard part) and the recovery (i.e. easy part). If you are not going easy enough to recover properly, each subsequent effort will lose its effectiveness as you start to draw on different energy systems.
- 5 And finally, if you’re not currently exercising regularly, we recommend checking up with a registered and qualified health professional before getting into it.

TIP

Start off easy - and check with your doctor first if you're not exercising regularly.