

4 Exercise Machines That Help Burn Fat And Build Muscle

If you're a fan of the exercise machines at your gym, you might put more thought into how to time your visit so there's actually one free than to what you do when you're on it, or how it's **benefitting your body**. The truth is, getting the most out of a machine takes strategy, and if you're looking to **maximize your time at the gym**, some machines are better than others. If a low-resistance **stationary bike session** or leisurely **elliptical hour** feels easy, that's probably because you're not expending as much energy as you could be. There are plenty of **benefits to going slow and steady**—it's great for cardiovascular health, and can help build your endurance and speed—but it's not going to give you a hardcore **calorie burn**.

Quick note here: If weight loss is your goal, burning calories through cardio work alone isn't going to do it. You also need to build lean muscle through **strength training**, and most importantly focus on eating a **healthy diet**, **getting enough sleep**, and **managing your stress**. With all this in mind, here are the ultra-efficient, expert-approved exercise machines you should focus on if your goal is to hit the gym, hit it hard, and hit the road.

1. Rowing Machine

Rowing machines have become gym-floor mainstays, and are excellent tools for **raising your heart rate** and **strengthening your legs, arms, and core**—all while sitting down! Not that it's a walk (er, row?) in the park. “Because the entire body is working at once, energy expenditure is very high,” Jeff Halevy, CEO of **Halevy Life** in NYC, previously told SELF.

“They challenge the user to be powerful and efficient,” adds **Crunch** master trainer **Ariel Iasevoli**. They work using wind or water resistance, so the more effort you put in, the harder it becomes (she recommends setting it at a level five to start).

The key to the cardio and strength benefits, though, is making sure you're using the machine the way it's designed to be used. “Yes, you can hop on one and use it incorrectly and still get an OK workout, but learning the proper timing and technique will provide an even greater workout,” explains Iasevoli.

- Start seated near the front of the machine with your legs bent and holding the handles in your hands and with a slight lean forward.
- Push back powerfully with your legs then follow with your arms by bringing the bar to your ribs and lean back slightly. Pause here for a moment.
- Straighten your arms back out, then bend your knees to bring your body back to the starting position (repeat: legs, arms, arms, legs).

It's all about control and power—if you're speeding through, you probably aren't using proper form. “A great rower looks like they're are going 'slow.’ Every stroke is powerful, so they don't need to rush,” says Iasevoli. This will help prevent you from getting exhausted too quickly.

2. Stair Climber

Using these machines (often known as StepMills or StairMasters) is like climbing a set of stairs that just never ends. It's not pleasant, but it's effective. “I like the stair climber because the user is standing the entire time, is time efficient, and it forces the user to keep moving the entire time,” says Iasevoli. It's **cardio on cardio on cardio**.

But you're also strengthening your **lower body**, too. After a few flights you're going to feel the burn in your **quads, butt, and hamstrings**. “Climbing stairs puts all of your body weight on a

single leg at a time in a lunge pattern,” Halevy explains. “The large muscle groups of the legs are being worked, so energy expenditure is very high.”

In addition to expending a ton of energy while you’re on the machine, having strong leg muscles is particularly great for [increasing your basal metabolic rate](#) (BMR)—because these lower-body muscles are so big, they’re some of the most metabolically active muscles in your body (muscle mass requires more energy to maintain, so you burn more calories at rest). And when you’re climbing with proper posture your core is working to keep you upright and balanced, too. To get started, Iasevoli suggests doing minute-on, minute-off intervals for 10 to 20 minutes, alternating between a faster and a slower speed. (Make sure your entire foot hits the stair with each step.)

The cardinal rule of stair climbing, according to Iasevoli and Halevy? No holding onto the arm rails for support. You can lightly rest your fingertips for balance, but for max benefits, don’t put weight into them.

3. Treadmill

Like the stair climber, “I like the treadmill because it forces the user to keep moving throughout the workout,” says Iasevoli. Two efficient ways to use it for heart-pumping cardio are [high-intensity intervals](#) and walking with the incline set high.

Treadmills are one of the simplest ways to incorporate high-intensity interval training (HIIT), which is an effective and efficient way to train. Because you’re “revving” your heart rate multiple times during a HIIT session, your body uses more energy to return to a resting state after the workout is over, burning more calories in the process. This is known as excess post-exercise oxygen consumption (EPOC), or the “[afterburn effect](#).” (Here are [10 treadmill interval workouts](#) to try.)

There’s no need to drive your heart rate through the roof during every workout session, though. It’s efficient for burning fat, but it puts a lot of stress on your body, so you don’t want to do it every day. Treadmills have an answer for that. Walking at a significant incline is an excellent way to burn fat without putting as much pressure on your joints. The afterburn effect isn’t as great, but because you’re keeping your heart rate in a moderate zone, you’ll still burn more calories from fat than from carbohydrates, explains Iasevoli.

Iasevoli recommends, “Walk at a moderate speed and increase the incline every couple of minutes until you get to about 8. Stay at 8 for 5 to 10 minutes and work yourself back down. You may also do an entire workout at 5 to 7 grade, increasing and decreasing the speed (slow walk to speed walk) every other minute.” Here’s a low-impact, [beginner-friendly walking interval workout](#) you can follow along with.

4. Fan Bike

One of the most challenging cardio machines out there is the fan bike (also referred to as the Assault Air or Airdyne bike). It looks similar to a stationary bike, but it has a large fan as a front wheel, and two handlebars that are higher than the seat. Unlike a stationary bike though, this equipment requires you to move your arms as well as your legs in order to peddle, and since

you're expending more energy to get it done, you're burning more calories. Like rowing machines, the bikes use wind resistance to create work. "Wind resistance is exponential, so the harder you pedal, the more challenging the workout," adds Iasevoli.

Because this machine is so intense, Iasevoli recommends starting with 10 seconds of all-out work followed by 50 seconds of rest, and repeat that for a total of 10 minutes. As you get more advanced, you can decrease your **ratio of work to rest**.

Ultimately, the machine you choose is up to personal preference. No matter what your goal is, the most effective and efficient machines are the ones you can be consistent with. So if you consider the treadmill the dreadmill, no sweat—try the rowing machine. And if you actually enjoy the elliptical, that's cool, too. It's all about making sure the intensity is there and putting in the work.

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