

# hit and run

this miracle 20-minute routine blasts fat fast—and will advance your pilates practice to the next level

by Joanna Powell

**W**hen Manhattan attorney Amy DiBernardo began practicing Pilates a year ago, she was rejuvenated by the toning, flexibility and posture improvements she saw. But long, demanding hours at her law firm often left her unable to make three-times-a-week sessions—and her fitness goals faltered.

That's when DiBernardo's trainer Allison Black, a Romana's Pilates-certified instructor and personal trainer at Living Proof Nutrition/Fitness in New York City, convinced her overextended client to try adding high intensity training (HIT), a new workout she was offering to her Pilates clients that had fantastic, fat-burning results. With HIT, Amy would do short bursts of exercise at killer intensity, then rest for 60 to 120 seconds to prepare for the next tough segment. While most people think of HIT or the similar high intensity interval training (HIIT) as a traditional "cardio" workout (running, pedaling, climbing), Black uses

MedX strength-training machines. Cranking up weight levels for short periods elevates heart rate dramatically. The beauty? The workout takes only twenty minutes.

"Now Amy does Pilates once or twice a week," says Black. "On another day, she zips into the studio, does her HIT training and is out in less than half an hour. She doesn't even change her clothes! We keep the room cool, about 68 degrees so clients don't sweat."

The results were "genius," reports DiBernardo, 32. "I saw changes in just two weeks. My body is more toned and I feel more relaxed. I don't feel like I have to 'fit' this into my schedule. Together with Pilates once or twice a week, it's the perfect workout."

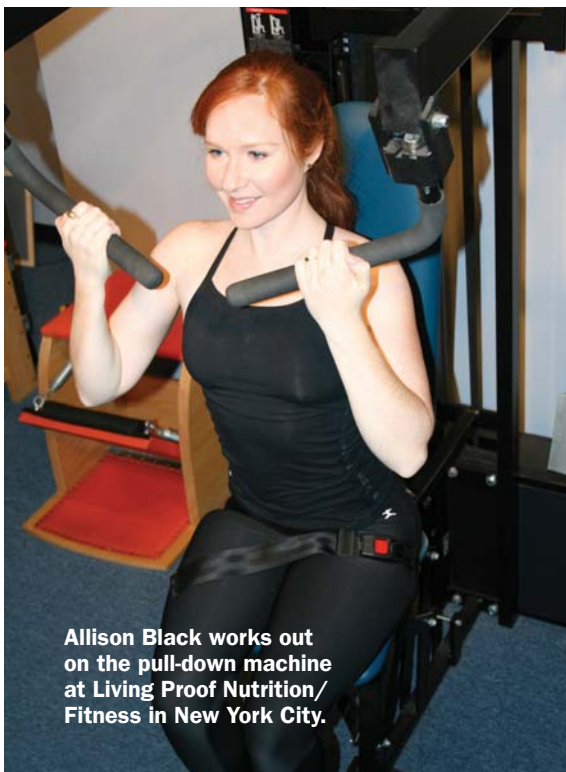
DeBernardo isn't the only Pilates fan to embrace this new high/low approach to training. HIT has been soaring in popularity over the past decade. Among trainers and kinesiologists, interval workouts are replacing steady-pace training altogether. Some fitness pros even suggest HIT's impact is superior. "If your goal is to shape up, tone and stay lean," says New York City trainer Anthony Nehra, "steady-state cardio should be avoided altogether or make up a very, very small portion of your fitness routine. It doesn't yield good long-term results." A recent study found that just two and a half hours of HIT had the same effect as ten hours of traditional cardio endurance exercise. But time-saving isn't its only advantage.

## core + cardio

HIIT, which falls under the "HIT" umbrella, has a number of other benefits that make it the ideal companion to Pilates. With heart disease the number-one killer of women, cardio is a must. But "sometimes Pilates doesn't get the heart rate up the way interval training does," says Kristine Bjornstad, Pilates instructor, personal trainer and owner of Perfect Form Studio in Cornelius, NC. "You're not going to get the same intensity doing Pilates over the same length of time."

Michele Olson, PhD, a Professor of Exercise Physiology at Auburn University in Montgomery, AL, explains, "HIIT training provides a strong cardio stimulus that complements the muscle conditioning and flexibility enhancing nature of Pilates."

The weight-loss potential of HIIT is also a top lure



Allison Black works out on the pull-down machine at Living Proof Nutrition/Fitness in New York City.

- The weight-loss potential of HIIT workouts is also a top lure to Pilates students who may have trouble shedding extra padding.

to Pilates students who may have trouble shedding extra padding. “It’s especially effective at banishing belly fat,” says Olson. “My 40- to 50-year old clients are thrilled with how interval training has helped fight the muffin top.” Studies in the *publication Medical Science and Sports Exercise* show that HIIT elevates resting metabolic rate for a full 24 hours after the workout. That means you’re blasting fat even while you sleep!

### how hiit can enhance your practice

One of Olson’s clients in Montgomery, AL, found that after HIIT training on the stationary bike, she had more stamina in her legs when doing standing Pilates work like Pliés, Standing Leg Circles and also mat exercises like Double-Leg and Single-Leg Bridges.

Increased upper-body strength is another plus. For DiBernardo, improved strength in her upper body allowed her to begin doing pull-ups at the end of her session (a traditional ending) and to master exercises on the Wunda Chair.

The strong core- and joint-enhancing benefits of Pilates go far to help prevent injuries during strenuous exercise. “Because of Pilates, you keep good workout form during an intense HIIT workout,” says Olson. “When you get tired, posture wanes and injuries are more likely.”

“Pilates helps you do everything better,” says Alycea Ungaro, best-selling author of *Pilates: Body in Motion*, *The Portable Pilates* and *The Pilates Promise*, who recently began doing kettlebell workouts.

“When I started swinging a kettlebell on my own at the gym, a trainer approached me and said, ‘You have such a pretty swing.’ And he wasn’t coming on to me! Our form, attention to detail, the way

we approach our work with care and grace and full body attention often gets lost on a more pedestrian workout.”

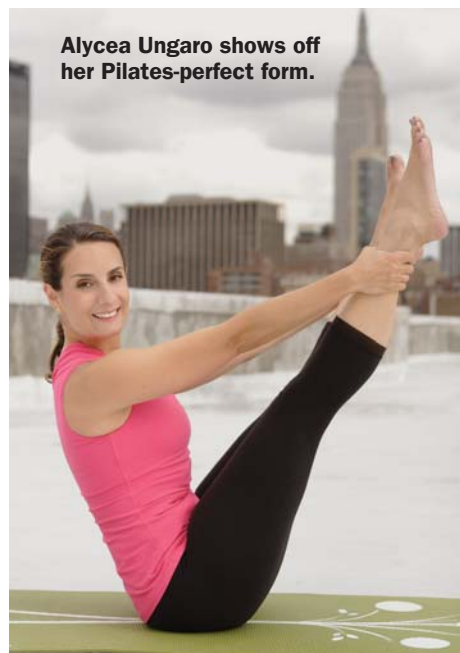
In Montgomery, Pam Patterson, 63, credits her combo of Pilates and HIIT with saving her from breaking bones during a fall off some outdoor stairs. She was able to adjust her balance as she was falling and brace her core muscles—and, thankfully, walked away with only a strained wrist.

### other cross-training benefits

Pilates students also love how HIIT improves athletic performance in sports like tennis and snowboarding. One of Bjornstad’s clients was delightfully surprised on her family’s annual ski trip. “She was now able to keep up with her husband on the ski slope,” says Bjornstad. It was apparent how her performance improved: Her core strength allowed her to quickly maneuver with her skis and kept her from falling, but her interval training allowed her to go faster and ski harder and longer.



**Michele Olson puts the pedal to the metal at Montgomery Country Club Fitness.**



**Alycea Ungaro shows off her Pilates-perfect form.**

### how to hiit it

The wonderful thing about interval training is that you can be creative and almost never do the same workout twice.

The most traditional approach is sprinting at high speed for 60-second intervals then walking or jogging for 60 seconds. Some trainers prefer the stationary bike,



**Kristine Bjornstad multitasks in Cornelius, NC.**

The key element of HIIT that makes it different from other forms of interval training is that the high-intensity intervals involve nearly maximum effort.

while others use kettlebells or a jump rope.

Allison Black's workout for Amy DiBernardo debunks the idea that cardio training has to involve pounding running. Her routine is strength training based—performed on MedX machines at super-heavyweight levels—that works the four main muscle groups: legs, chest, shoulders and back. “Weights alone will get your heart rate up,” says Black. “I’ve worn a heart rate monitor to verify that this is

intervals involve nearly maximum effort. Alycea Ungaro, of New York City’s Real Pilates studio, says “By definition HIIT is at 90 to 100 percent maximum exertion. You go for short bursts until you can’t possibly go any further.”

But don’t depend completely on a heart rate monitor. Because the intervals in HIIT are so short, “by the time your heart rate gets really up there, you’ll be lying on the ground,” says J.J. Virgin, co-host of TLC’s *Freaky Eaters*. So instead of relying on the numbers on a monitor, “you want to go all out for 30 to 60 seconds. The deal is you are pushing so hard you have to stop. You’ve had it.”

A good way to judge your intensity is through breathing, says Bjornstad. “You would have a very difficult time speaking when you’re at 80 percent intensity. If you feel you could go longer, you either need to go faster or deeper into the movement. You need to push yourself harder.”

Opinions differ on lengths of bursts. Some suggest 30-second explosions, other 60 or 90 seconds. A trainer can help you work out your best plan, or you can use the following guidelines from Anthony Nehra. It’s important to have a clock with a second hand, or a stopwatch (most smart phones have one built in) to time your intervals.

true. On the first machine, the chest press, my heart rate went from 60 to 140 in just (the first) 60 seconds.”

Some teachers even incorporate HIIT into clients’ Pilates sessions. In Cornelius, NC, Kristine Bjornstad works in about nine to 18 minutes of HIIT during a 55-minute Pilates session. “I have my client get off the Reformer periodically and do three 90-second sets of explosive exercises using her own body as resistance,” she says. (Think lunges, squats, football shuffles, and tough jumps.) Recovery between bursts is marching or light jogging.

**how hard is hard enough?**

Because of differences in age, weight and fitness levels, it’s difficult to provide specific numbers for speeds, machine settings or even target heart rates. The key element of HIIT that makes it different from other forms of interval training is that the high-intensity

- 1 Warm up for three to five minutes**
- 2 Beginners should start with a shorter burst and longer recovery, usually a 1:3 or 1:4 ratio. If your burst is 30 seconds, recover with a 90 second to 2-minute walk, then repeat up to 18 to 20 minutes.**
- 3 As you become more fit, you can shorten the low and intensify the high. A 1:1 ratio, where you’re going the same time length for your burst and your rest, is very challenging.**
- 4 Elite athletes can do a 2:1 work-recover ratio. But this is extremely grueling and usually lasts no longer than five minutes.**

**Note** As you become more fit, your high intervals should not become longer, just more intense.

# Three HIT WORKOUTS that deliver fast results

High intensity training is an increasingly popular way to burn fat, increase heart health and improve athletic prowess—and you only need 20 minutes to do an effective workout. Just like Pilates, it's about quality over quantity! Here, trainers detail their favorite routines:

## Allison Black's Strength-based HIT WORKOUT

A typical routine covers all of the major muscle groups. At Living Proof NYC, trainers use MedX machines, but you could use this routine at home or at the gym. This is called the 3/90 routine, meaning you do one exercise three times without rest without rest for a total of 90 seconds.

**LEG PRESS** (or squat): Extend legs out slowly for 15 seconds, without allowing knees to lock. Bring legs back in for 15 seconds. Repeat 2 more times, beginning each repetition without resting.

**REST** 60-120 seconds

**CHEST PRESS** (or push-up): Extend arms out slowly for 15 seconds, without allowing elbows to lock. Bring arms back slowly for 15 seconds. Repeat 2 more times, beginning each repetition without resting.

**REST** 60-120 seconds

**LAT PULL DOWN:** Pull bar down to your chest slowly for 15 seconds and reverse slowly for 15 seconds. Repeat twice more without resting between repetitions.

**OVERHEAD PRESS** Lift weights over head slowly for 15 seconds and reverse slowly for 15 seconds. Repeat for a total of 3 repetitions.

**REST** 60-120 seconds

*Allison Black is the Pilates Director at Living Proof Nutrition/Fitness in New York City.*

## Alycea Ungaro's JUMPROPE HIIT WORKOUT

**WARMUP** 3–5 minutes marching or skipping rope

**JUMP ROPE** for 60 seconds at a pace that leaves you breathless

**RECOVER** 1–3 minutes marching or skipping rope

**REPEAT** until you've done 20 minutes total.

*Alycea Ungaro is a Pilates instructor and physical therapist at Real Pilates studio in New York City.*

## Michele Olson, PYRAMID HIIT RIDE on stationary bike

(Note: Rate of Perceived Effort scale: a RPE of 1 is "No Effort" and a RPE of 10 is "Maximum Effort.")

**WARM UP** 4 minutes at 70 RPMs or 4 RPE (Rate of Perceived Exertion)

**BURST** 20 seconds, seated at 90 RPMs or 6 RPE

**RECOVER** 40 seconds seated at 60 RPMs or 3 RPE

**Repeat once**

**BURST** 20 seconds, standing at 85 RPMs or 7 RPE

**RECOVER** 40 seconds, seated at 60 RPMs or 6 RPE

**REPEAT TWICE**

**BURST** 10 seconds, standing climb posture at 80 RPMs or 8 RPE

**RECOVER** 40 seconds seated at 60 RPMs or 3 RPE

**REPEAT ONCE**

**YOU HAVE REACHED THE TOP OF THE PYRAMID!**

**BURST** 20 seconds, standing climb posture at 80 RPMs or 8 RPE

**RECOVER** 40 seconds, seated at 60 RPMs or 3 RPE

**REPEAT ONCE**

**BURST** 20 seconds, standing at 85 RPMs or 7 RPE

**RECOVER** 40 seconds, seated at 60 RPMs or 3 RPE

**REPEAT TWICE**

**BURST** 20 seconds, seated at 90 RPMs or 6 RPE

**RECOVER** 40 seconds, seated at 60 RPMs or 3 RPE

**REPEAT ONCE**

**COOLDOWN** 2 minutes, seated at 70 RPMs or 2 RPE

*Michele Olson, PhD, is a Fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine, Professor of Exercise Physiology at Auburn University Montgomery*

Some people see results from doing HIIT sessions just once a week. Two or three times combined with three sessions of Pilates is ideal. It's important to remember that your body needs to recover from this type of training, so never do HIIT two days in a row.

"High intensity interval training is a hard workout, but it's short, and people love how they feel, knowing they pushed their bodies past their comfort points," says Bjornstad. "The results keep people coming back! They're getting smaller, their cores are getting tighter and their

butts are getting perkier." **ps**

*Joanna Powell is an NYC-based freelance journalist with a special interest in fitness. Her work has appeared in People, Good Housekeeping and Glamour magazines.*