How Many Calories Do You Really Burn in a Cycling Class? We Know You're Wondering by Gina Florio

Some cycling studios make pretty wild claims about how many calories you'll burn from an hour-long class. For example, I was once promised that I would fly through 1,000 calories in one sitting, which sounded a bit hokey to me, but I appreciated the enthusiasm behind it. The more I asked around, the more I realized that I'm not the only one wondering what the truth is, so I decided to investigate.



I spoke with Michael Olzinski, MSc, Purplepatch endurance coach and Equinox coach, who said, "Even though the benefits of a cycling class are really not about how many calories you are burning (much like how nutrition is not really related to how 'many' calories you intake), it does make sense to have a realistic idea."

First of all, it's important to know that the amount of calories you burn doesn't only have to do with how long you cycle and what kind of class you do. "It is about your own personal effort," Mike said.

If you're working hard — as in, 85 to 95 percent of your physical capacity — you could potentially burn upwards of 550 calories in an hour-long class. However, this is only if you're going hard. "Ultimately, the harder you work, the better intervals or power you hit, the higher the work for your body, and that is basically the measure of calories," Mike explained to POPSUGAR.

I always wear my Fitbit to my cycling classes, and when I'm done, it generally says I've burned anywhere between 350 and 400 calories. If I'm being honest, I'm not always giving it 95 percent of my physical capacity, so I can see why I'm not reaching the 550 mark.

However, Mike wants to stress that the number of calories you burn shouldn't be your main concern. "If you truly are working hard and at the requested intensities of the coaches, then you will experience this excellent effect called 'Excessive Post-Exercise Oxygen Consumption' or EPOC," he explained. "This means that your body will require more oxygen for the remainder of your day, and thus your metabolism will require more calories to sustain, and this is really where the true benefit comes in."

In other words: sure, it's good to burn calories during class and see a high number on your fitness watch when you're walking out the door, but you'll get so much more out of your cycling class if you experience EPOC, which will help you burn more calories throughout the rest of the day. That's what's going to cause positive change in the long run.

Just to be sure, I asked Mike if indoor cycling is a form of cardio he would recommend. This was his response: "I definitely love indoor cycling as a great and very useful form of cardio training. It's very repeatable, and cycling is one of those things that, when you are set up properly and riding in a safe, effective position and posture, you can progress very quickly by putting in some hard work." Key words here being "hard work."

Follow the instructor's commands and go all out, and you'll reap all the benefits of your cycling class — whether or not you hit the 550-calorie mark.

Thoughts and feedback?

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