



Perceived Exertion Scale

What is the Perceived Exertion Scale?

The perceived exertion scale is a simple way for you to recognize how hard you are working while you exercise (exercise intensity), especially when measuring your heart rate. It helps you evaluate your internal comfort zone, or “how you feel” during exercise with regard to the normal sensation of exertion, breathing, or even discomfort. This scale is also useful for people who are on medications that control their heart rate, or people who have a hard time finding their pulse.

How do I use the Perceived Exertion Scale?

To use the perceived exertion scale, take a moment to sense how you are feeling. Now relate that feeling to one of the numbers on the RPE scale. For example, sitting in a chair you might perceive to be a 0.5 “very, very, weak” or very low effort on the perceived exertion scale. Walking at a moderate pace, you might perceive to be a 5 “strong” or 3 “moderate” effort on the perceived exertion scale. A perceived exertion effort of between 6 and 8 is the right target range for moderate intensity level aerobic exercise. It is advised that you do not exercise at “very, very strong” or at “maximal” effort. You should be able to talk as you exercise.

Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE)*

- 0 Nothing at all
- 0.5 Very, very weak
- 1 Very weak
- 2 Weak
- 3 Moderate
- 4 Somewhat strong
- 5 Strong

6

7 Very strong

8

9

10 Very, Very Strong

* modified Borg scale.

When should I stop exercising?

If you feel any of the symptoms listed below stop exercising right away:

- Chest pain such as pressure or burning
- Chest pain that goes to the shoulders or down the arm
- Extreme dizziness, feeling confused, or weak
- Extreme shortness of breath or trouble breathing

If any of the symptoms persist, seek medical assistance right away or call 911.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

©2011 The Regents of the University of Michigan
Author: MHealthy Physical Activity Program
Reviewer: Erica Wald
Last Revised March 2012