



HARD HIITING



With warnings of high injury rates casting a shadow over the hugely popular high-intensity interval training (HIIT), **Craig Smith** spoke to the Chair of the REPs Technical Expert Group, **Nicky Lawson**, about delivering safe HIIT sessions.



“**The technical expert’s role is to ensure the programme meets the required criteria.**”

As a HIIT session involves bursts of hard, high-intensity work mixed with short rest periods before going again, it is of paramount importance the body is primed to work within these parameters.

The Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness has published a report by Rutgers University in the United States that indicates a gradual rise in the number of injuries attributed to the use of exercise equipment which, when focusing on people’s choice of exercise, links the increase of injury with the popularity of HIIT.

The study found that nearly four million injuries resulted from the use of barbells, kettle bells and boxes – all items of equipment used in high-intensity interval training – as well as from doing calisthenics (ie lunges, burpees and push-ups).

However, the advice is certainly not to stop doing HIIT, given its many health benefits, but for trainers and instructors to carry out a stringent risk assessment on those set to embark on a HIIT session.

The Technical Expert Group (TEG) made a decision in 2015 to put all HIIT courses through the ‘assessed’ category of endorsement. Nicky Lawson explained the reason for this and some of the key areas that PTs and exercise instructors need to consider when delivering HIIT classes.

“When PD:Approval appoints one of its technical experts to evaluate a new continuing professional development (CPD) programme, they will always select an expert who is qualified and experienced in that particular discipline.

“The technical expert’s role is then to ensure that the programme meets the required criteria to be





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approved and subsequently endorsed. This criteria is determined by the TEG for PD:Approval and is reviewed regularly.

“Disciplines that are not covered in an instructor’s entry qualification, such as HIIT, must include a robust practical and theory assessment as one of the criteria, as well as having a minimum of eight guided learning hours.”

It is vital to ensure that any classes delivered to the general public are suitable for the

participants. PTs must ensure they have information of any pre-existing health conditions before they start the physical activity session and make sure the session is delivered at a level that matches the participants’ capabilities. Instructors should monitor technique and intensity levels, and cue correct technique where necessary, making sure that beginner clients are working within their capacity. Where appropriate, the instructor should regress or

progress exercises according to the participants’ needs and abilities.

“You have to screen the participants beforehand to ascertain whether there are any contraindications to exercise. If there are contraindications to that exercise then it’s essential that the instructor refers them to a suitably qualified professional who can help them,” says Nicky, who is also a Technical Evaluator for PD:Approval. It is important to note that there is not a one-size-fits-all

approach to assessing people undertaking a HIIT session. The protocol for PTs working with an individual is different to that of a group exercise instructor, as Nicky testifies:

“A personal trainer entering a one-to-one relationship with a client will go through a consultation process, spending a substantial amount of time with that individual before commencing a fitness assessment and writing an individualised programme. A group exercise instructor will not necessarily know who is going to turn up to their class on a particular day, so at the beginning of the class it is their responsibility to verbally screen the participants, asking if they have any injuries or any health concerns the instructor should be aware of.

“It is down to the participants to declare it and it is then the responsibility of the instructor to decide whether he/she is qualified to deal with that individual. New clients may also be asked to complete a simple PAR-Q form.”

It is crucial to point out here that every individual should have responsibility and a degree of ownership for their own body, and be aware of any pre-existing conditions and physical weaknesses they may have that could predispose them to injury. They should also listen to what their body is telling them, and the PT or instructor must respect the decision of the participant if they feel they are being pushed too hard.

“The recommendation is that anyone starting an exercise programme should start on a safe, low-intensity programme and gradually build up to the point of being able to do a HIIT programme,” Nicky adds. Despite studies such as the one from Rutgers University, PTs, exercise instructors and other fitness professionals should still feel comfortable to promote activities such as HIIT, so long as due diligence is carried out and records are maintained. The advice from Nicky is for “all fitness professionals to keep up to date on current research,

making sure they update their skills regularly”, which is why REPs members have to achieve a minimum of 10 CPD points every 12 months, and why REPs recognised training providers list their endorsed training at pdphub.com.

As with any fitness training that comes into the industry, if sessions are performed safely and correctly, the long-term health benefits will continue to be seen, and, in this instance, everyone can continue to ‘take the HIIT’.

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What does the Technical Expert Group look at?

- The TEG is a panel of experts made up of evaluators with a wide range of experience and knowledge in a variety of disciplines who review CPD programmes and industry awards for endorsement by

PD:Approval in order for them to be recognised by REPs.

- The TEG meets regularly to ensure that the criteria against which CPD is evaluated is fit for purpose, relevant to the industry and robust, safe and effective.



Next steps

Do you have any questions for, or about, the TEG?

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