



High Intensity Interval Training: Enhancing Health Outcomes for Individuals with Coronary Artery Disease

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Abstract

Coronary artery disease (CAD) contributed to morbidity and mortality significantly in the world that is characterized by accumulation of atherosclerotic plaque within the arterial walls. Individuals with CAD often experience reduced functional capacity, lower quality of life (QoL), and elevated rates of depression. This study aims to explore high-interval intensity training (HIIT) benefits in coronary artery disease patients. This study is a review literature that uses the existing database on PubMed and Google Scholar with the year 2019 to 2024 which specifically discusses High interval intensity training in coronary artery patients. The results of the study revealed that the benefits of high interval intensity training have an impact such as increasing physical capacity, namely VO₂ and cardiovascular health and have a good impact on mental health. High interval intensity training is beneficial for people with coronary artery disease even though the first hour of exercise takes time for body adjustment. The implementation of high interval intensity training needs to involve professionals.



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INTRODUCTION

Coronary artery disease (CAD) is the leading cause of significant morbidity and mortality both in the US and globally (Shahjehan et al., 2024). CAD is a widespread heart condition marked by the accumulation of atherosclerotic plaque within the arterial walls, which impedes blood flow and reduces oxygen supply to the heart muscle (Shahjehan et al., 2024). Individuals with CAD often experience reduced functional capacity, lower quality of life (QoL), and elevated rates of depression (Terada et al., 2022).

Exercise plays a vital role, as cardiorespiratory fitness (measured by peak oxygen consumption (VO₂peak) has the greatest impact on cardiovascular outcomes (Taylor et al., 2020). Extensive research shows that aerobic capacity (VO₂peak) is the strongest predictor of future health, all-cause mortality, and cardiovascular risk (Ito, 2019). For overall health and both primary and secondary cardiovascular prevention, high-intensity interval training (HIIT) is recognized as an effective exercise approach, offering short, intense workout sessions (Ito, 2019). Exercise training is a fundamental component of multidisciplinary rehabilitation for individuals with coronary artery disease (CAD) (McGregor et al., 2023). As a key element of modern secondary prevention strategies, exercise can enhance both physical and mental health (McGregor et al., 2023).

Interval training involves short bursts of intense activity that reach at least 90% of VO₂max, more than 75% of maximal power, or supra-maximal effort, followed by rest or low-intensity exercise for recovery. One of the most common interval training approaches is high-intensity interval training (HIIT), which includes submaximal efforts that achieve

≥90% of VO₂max or exceed 75% of maximal power (Atakan et al., 2021).

The duration of HIIT sessions typically ranges from 30 seconds to several minutes. This type of training has been adapted for individuals with lifestyle-related conditions, including those with or without cardiac diseases (Ito, 2019). Recently proof-of-concept trials (including 2 large multi-center randomized controlled trials, RCTs) have been conducted by applying HIIT to patients with CAD and heart failure in cardiac rehabilitation which demonstrated generally positive effect (Keech et al. 2020)

Cardiac rehabilitation (CR) is a crucial element in the secondary prevention of CAD, demonstrating significant reductions in both cardiovascular and overall mortality (Taylor et al., 2020). However, current international cardiac rehabilitation (CR) guidelines emphasize the need for additional research into the feasibility, safety, and long-term adherence to HIIT (Taylor et al., 2020). This study aims to explore high-interval intensity training (HIIT) benefits in coronary artery disease patients through literature review, not only in VO₂ and cardiovascular, but also mentally.

METHODS

This study employs a literature review research method, where relevant journals and theoretical references related to the research topic are explored. The process involves searching for, analyzing, and synthesizing information to strengthen the analysis. Data for the study was collected from Google Scholar (18.200) and PubMed (88 articles) with 9 articles specifically explaining HIIT in coronary artery disease using the keywords "High-intensity interval training" and "coronary artery disease."

The articles selected for review were published between 2019 and 2024.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The of the study based on the literature used revealed that high-intensity interval training with a duration of 30 seconds to several minutes can be applied both individuals with or without cardiovascular disease in general can increase VO₂ peak as a predictor of health and risk factors for cardiovascular disease, as well as have an effect on improving the quality of life for patients with coronary artery disease. In addition to increasing VO₂ peak, regular exercise has a positive impact that lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease and improves self-reported general health and vitality. High-intensity interval training also demonstrated impact on mental health such as reducing depression severity and increasing Brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) concentrations.

VO₂

Cardiac rehabilitation (CR) exercise training guidelines specifically aim to enhance cardiorespiratory fitness, particularly peak oxygen uptake (VO₂ peak), which is a key clinical outcome (McGregor et al., 2023). High-intensity interval training (HIIT) has demonstrated greater improvements in VO₂ peak compared to moderate-intensity continuous training (MICT) in individuals with coronary artery disease (CAD) (Taylor et al., 2020).

In a previous randomized clinical trial, a 4-week high-intensity interval training (HIIT) program showed improvements in VO₂ peak compared to moderate-intensity continuous training (MICT) in patients with coronary artery disease (CAD) participating in cardiac rehabilitation. However, at the 12-month follow-up, VO₂ peak improvements were

similar between the two groups. HIIT was both feasible and safe, with adherence rates comparable to MICT over the 12-month period. These findings support the inclusion of HIIT in cardiac rehabilitation programs as an adjunct or alternative to moderate-intensity exercise (Taylor et al., 2020).

In other studies, low-volume HIIT initially used with the intensity gradually increased once participants were able to complete all 10 × 1-minute intervals. The protocol included 10 high-intensity intervals (85–90% peak power output (PPO) achieved during cardiopulmonary exercise tests (CPET); >85% HR_{max}) alternated with 10 low-intensity intervals (20–25% PPO) (McGregor et al., 2023). The intensity shifts were achieved by adjusting cadence, ensuring that participants maintained a perceived exertion (RPE) of less than 17 during the final two high-intensity intervals. Results showed that the HIIT intervention led to a 35% greater improvement in VO₂ peak compared to moderate-intensity steady-state (MISS) training at the 8-week follow-up, suggesting a significant functional gain (McGregor et al., 2023). Furthermore, since there were no major differences in left ventricular structure or function between the groups, these results imply that the improvement in VO₂ peak was likely due to peripheral adaptations rather than central system changes (McGregor et al., 2023).

A significant positive correlation was observed between changes in VO₂ peak and quality of life markers, highlighting the role of cardiorespiratory fitness in improving quality of life (Kristiansen et al., 2022). Kristiansen et al (2022) demonstrated an improvement in quality of life following the 12-week HIIT intervention, in comparison to standard care. While it is well-established that exercise training enhances quality of life in CAD patients,

recent studies have explored whether HIIT or moderate-intensity continuous training differently affect quality of life (Kristiansen et al., 2022).

Meta analysis research found that HIIT induces an overall significantly larger increase in $\text{VO}_{2\text{peak}}$ (1.92 mL/kg/min, 95%CI [1.30, 2.53], $p < 0.01$) than MICT with low heterogeneity ($p = 0.35$, $I^2 = 9\%$) (Du et al., 2021). HIIT places maximal stress on the oxygen uptake, transport, and utilization systems, thereby offering the most potent stimulus for improving $\text{VO}_{2\text{peak}}$ (Buccheit et al, 2013; Du et al., 2021) A 6 month follow-up of HIIT and MICT in coronary artery bypass patients revealed that aerobic capacity improved to a greater extent following HIIT (Moholdt et al., 2009; Quindry et al., 2019). Pattyn et al., conducted a 12 month follow-up after a similar HIIT-MICT multi-site randomized controlled trial, which showed that HIIT and MICT patients exhibited similar benefits in cardiorespiratory fitness, endothelial function, coronary risk factors, and quality of life (Pattyn et al., 2016; Quindry et al., 2019)

Previous randomized controlled trials (RCTs) comparing HIIT and moderate continuous training (MCT) for CAD patients, aimed at improving aerobic capacity, have shown mixed results. The protocols and number of studies demonstrating HIIT's superiority over MCT. Among the protocols, the 4×4 -minute protocol was the most commonly used, with a success rate of 70.2% for CAD patients. Other protocols, with exercise durations of 30 seconds, 2 minutes, and 3 minutes, also showed effectiveness in a limited number of studies (Ito, 2019). $\text{VO}_{2\text{peak}}$ showed a significant increase after 10 weeks of training, with a greater improvement in the high-intensity group. The high-intensity aerobic exercise group

completed a 5-minute warm-up consisting of treadmill walking at an intensity corresponding to 50–60% of $\text{VO}_{2\text{peak}}$ (65–75% of HR peak), followed by four 4-minute intervals of walking at 80–90% of $\text{VO}_{2\text{peak}}$ (85–95% of HR peak) (Rogmo et al., 2004). However, exercise testing should be conducted under the supervision of a physician prior to engaging in vigorous activity, particularly for patients with cardiovascular conditions (Thompson et al., 2003; Rogmo et al., 2004). For patients with coronary artery disease (CAD), it is recommended to engage in aerobic exercise at least three times a week, for a minimum of 20 minutes, at an intensity of at least 40% of $\text{VO}_{2\text{peak}}$ to enhance exercise capacity (American College of Sports Medicine Position Stand; Rogmo et al., 2004).

In addition to the positive impact on quality of life, HIIT also improved self-reported general health and vitality, which has been supported by other exercise training studies involving patient groups. These factors are crucial for exercise motivation, adherence, and continuation, suggesting that HIIT may be a sustainable training modality for CAD patients (Kristiansen et al., 2022).

Cardiovascular Fitness

Regular exercise reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality in healthy, elderly individuals (Kristiansen et al., 2022). A large retrospective study indicated that cardiac rehabilitation is linked to lower mortality in elderly CAD patients (>65 years old), although the precise mechanisms remain largely unclear (Kristiansen et al., 2022). One possible explanation for the observed improvements in cardiovascular health among elderly individuals engaging in regular exercise is the enhanced responsiveness of the β -adrenergic receptor, which deteriorates with aging

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Patients with CAD are at a higher risk of atherothrombotic events, which may partly be due to a procoagulant state (Kosuta et al., 2024). Coagulation biomarkers and hemostatic potentials are elevated in CAD patients, suggesting that the balance between coagulation and fibrinolysis shifts towards increased coagulation (Antovic, 2010; Kosuta et al., 2024). Higher baseline levels of overall hemostatic potential (OHP) and overall coagulation potential (OCP), along with lower baseline levels of overall fibrinolytic potential (OFP), confirming the existence of a procoagulant state in CAD patients (Antovic, 2010; Kosuta et al., 2024).

Kosuta et al (2024) found that levels of OHP, OCP, fibrinogen, D-dimer, and von Willebrand factor increased after exercise, while OFP showed a mild decrease. This hemostatic pattern reflects a shift towards coagulation, consistent with previous findings in healthy individuals. Transient exercise-induced increase in procoagulant markers may help explain the heightened risk of atherothrombotic events immediately following exercise. During the recovery period post-exercise, coagulation biomarkers and OHP

returned to baseline levels, suggesting that the procoagulant effects of exercise in CAD patients are temporary, typically lasting no more than an hour (Kosuta et al., 2024).

Transient shift include stress responses such as adrenergic stimulation, endothelial-dependent and inflammation-mediated coagulation (Elsen et al. 2021; Kosuta et al., 2024). Acute exercise bouts increase sympathetic activity, which in turn activates coagulation and fibrinolytic pathways, producing a net procoagulant effect. Additionally, transient endothelial dysfunction and inflammation-oxidation during high-intensity exercise could promote platelet activity and enhance procoagulant pathways. Plasma volume depletion during exercise may also lead to hemoconcentration, affecting coagulation biomarker measurements and potentially driving coagulation cascades. While these hemostatic responses to exercise in healthy individuals are thought to be an evolutionary adaptation to protect against bleeding during injuries, in CAD patients, the combination of baseline hypercoagulability and the exercise-induced procoagulant shift may be considered an unfavorable risk factor (Kosuta et al., 2024). In some cases, high intensity exercise has shown more beneficial effects on the cardiovascular system and EDR compared to low intensity exercise (Batacan et al., 2018; Tian & Meng. 2019). The advantage of high intensity intermittent exercise refers to the fact that shorter periods such as 3-4 sessions/week will produce significant changes (Kannan et al. 2014; Tian & Meng. 2019). However, there is a paradoxical disadvantage about anaerobic exercise that increased mortality and sudden death are caused by high intensity activity (Tian et al., 2019).

Mental Health

Mental health indicators can be classified into three broad categories: cognitive functioning (e.g., attention, perception, and memory), well-being (e.g., self-concept and eudaimonic well-being), and illness (e.g., depression and anxiety). (Costigan et al., 2016). In terms of cognition, the relationship between physical activity and tasks or task components that require a high degree of executive function (i.e., intentional environmental interaction components that require processes such as inhibition, working memory, and cognitive tinkering) (Hillman et al., 2014; Costigan et al., 2016)

The benefits of traditional cardiac rehabilitation (CR) using moderate-intensity continuous training (MICT) for patients with coronary artery disease (CAD) are well-documented in terms of both physical and mental health. In earlier studies, high-intensity interval training (HIIT) was conducted using either aerobic exercise equipment (such as treadmills, cycle ergometers, and ellipticals) or (ii) dance/movement-based routines. Each HIIT session lasted 45 minutes and followed a modified Norwegian aerobic HIIT protocol, which included: (i) a 10-minute warm-up at 60–70% peak heart rate (HR); (ii) four 4-minute high-intensity intervals at 85–95% peak HR, interspersed with 3-minute low-intensity recovery periods at 60–70% peak HR (totaling 28 minutes); and (iii) a 5–10-minute cooldown at 60–70% peak HR with strength and stretching exercises. These studies demonstrated the effectiveness of alternative exercise interventions (HIIT and Nordic walking) in improving functional capacity, reducing depression severity, increasing Brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) concentrations, and enhancing quality of life (QoL) in CAD patients who had recently undergone coronary

revascularization procedures (Reed et al., 2021).

Participants in the experimental group received 8 treatment sessions, one per week, lasting 50–60 minutes, and supervised by a physiotherapist with over 10 years of experience. The HIIT combined with resistance exercises (HIIT + R) program was structured into warm-up (10–15 minutes, low intensity), active exercise (3-minute bouts × 10), and cool-down (10–15 minutes, low intensity) phases. The warm-up and cool-down included light-intensity walking (RPE 9–11; 3–5 minutes), range-of-motion movements for the upper and lower limbs, and light stretching. The active exercise bouts included 1 minute of high-intensity treadmill walking (85%–90% maximum HR), followed by 1 minute of low-intensity walking (60%–70% maximum HR), and then 1 minute of low-to-moderate-intensity resistance exercises (30%–50% of 1RM, 2 sets of 15 repetitions). The resistance exercises, designed to target major muscle groups, were rotated during each bout. Given the older age of the participants, safety was a key consideration, and a conservative approach was adopted by combining resistance exercises with aerobic activity in each bout to allow adequate rest before the high-intensity phase of the next bout. The intensity of the resistance exercises was kept between 30% and 50% of 1RM throughout the 8 weeks, with exercise intensity regulated by heart rate monitoring using a Polar HR monitor (FS2C; Polar Electro Oy, Kempele, Finland). Heart rate, blood pressure, and perceived exertion were measured before, during, and after each session (Deka et al., 2022).

Goncalves et al (2024) conducted a study comparing the effects of HIIT in 6 and 12 months found a significant pattern of improvement in social function, physical role and mental

activity, the HIIT group in 6 and 12 months post-intervention continued to show a decrease in anxiety and depression scores, while the control group maintained the previous increasing trend.

The current study also found that quality of life improved significantly after a 12-week HIIT intervention compared to standard care. Moreover, there was a strong positive correlation between changes in VO₂ peak and improvements in quality of life markers, underscoring the importance of cardiorespiratory fitness in enhancing quality of life (Kristiansen et al., 2022). Previous research suggests that HIIT may benefit mental health, that showed with significant improvements in depression and anxiety severity in pre-post HIIT measurements (Martland et al., 2019). Even Though no systematic review has examined the impact of HIIT on individuals with diagnosed mental illnesses. Therefore, further research is needed across various mental disorders, including major depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder, to determine whether HIIT can enhance health outcomes in these populations (Martland et al., 2019).

The decrease in physical activity might also play a role in the higher rates of mental health disorders (such as anxiety and depression) that develop during late adolescence (ages 15–19) (Beauchamp et al., 2018; Leahy et al., 2020). Engaging in physical exercise is believed to trigger neurobiological responses through the release of endogenous opioids, such as endorphins. The "endorphin hypothesis" attributes the improvement in mood following exercise to the increased release of β -endorphins (Saaniyoki et al., 2017; Leahy et al., 2020)

CONCLUSION

High intensity interval training can increase VO₂ peak, Regular exercise reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality in healthy, beneficial in reducing depression severity and increasing Brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) concentrations.

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