Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE)

Rating your perceived exertion is a way of determining the intensity of your exercise by how you feel on a scale of six to twenty, with six being extremely light. The scale, known as the Borg scale, is:

6  
7  Very, very light  
8  
9  Very light  
10  
11  Fairly light  
12  
13  Somewhat hard  
14  
15  Hard  
16  
17  Very hard  
18  
19  Very, very hard  
20

How to Use the Borg Scale

When you're exercising, ask yourself how hard you feel you're exercising, taking into account your amount of exertion, stress, effort, and fatigue. If you barely feel like you're exerting yourself, you might rate your intensity a 6 or 7. If you're exercising comfortably, with some exertion and a slightly elevated heart rate, the rating might be 11. And so on.

If you're a beginning exerciser or an exerciser with medical constraints, aim for 12 - 13. Experienced exercisers might aim for 14-17, and athletes in training can push themselves to 17-19.

Is your intensity too high?

If you experience any of these signs, decrease the intensity of your exercise exertion:

- Discomfort
- Light-headedness, paleness, nausea, cold or clammy skin
- Severe fatigue
- Significant drop or rise in blood pressure
- Noticeable change in heart rhythm
- Chest discomfort
- Shortness of breath, wheezing, leg cramps

Talk Test Method

A simple way of making sure your intensity is not too high is how well you can carry on a conversation. If you can talk normally without having to take an extraordinary breath, your intensity is appropriate. If you are short of breath or have trouble talking, you should reduce your intensity.