

The Tabata Method  
Fat Loss in Four Minutes  
by Dan John

A couple of years ago, a company came out with an exercise machine that guaranteed results in only four minutes a day. The main problem? The \$12,000 price tag. My car doesn't cost that much. I'm not sure I've ever spent that much on anything, including my education.

Well, I'm going to save you a lot of money today because I'm going to show you how to do the same thing without an overpriced machine. This "top secret" training method may do more for you than all your other training combined and leave you with 23 hours and 56 minutes to live the rest of your day.

But there's a price to pay. Think exhaustion, vomit and pools of sweat.

### Enter the Tabata Method

Tabata is the name of a Japanese researcher who discovered an interesting way to increase both anaerobic and aerobic pathways *at the same time*. It's one of those strange training programs that seems to fit across disciplines: it's excellent for bicyclists, speed skaters, Olympic lifters, or the person looking to lose fat quickly.

This training method is so simple, yet so incredibly difficult, that athletes tend to try it once, acknowledge its greatness, and then vow to never speak its name again. What is it? It's simple: take one exercise and perform it in the following manner:

- 1) For twenty seconds, do as many repetitions as possible.
- 2) Rest for ten seconds
- 3) Repeat seven more times!

That's it! You're done in four minutes! Oh, and that thing you're trying to brush off your face? That would be the floor.

Eight sets of "as many reps as you can get done," followed with a brief ten second rest— simple and effective. The two best exercise options for the Tabata method are the front squats and the "thruster," which I'll describe in a bit.

It helps to have someone record the reps of each set for you because, well, you won't remember after you pass out. I use the "lowest rep number" of any of the eight sets as my measurement to compare workout to workout. If you go too heavy, that number might be two. If you go too light, you might find yourself getting around 15 reps or more.

Before we talk about the exercises, let's take a moment to be perfectly clear about what we're doing. This isn't "eight sets of eight," although the goal of doing eight reps in each of the twenty second clusters is about right. Instead it's "as many reps as I can get in" during the twenty seconds, followed by ten seconds rest.

And by the way, ten seconds is *not* racking the bar, getting a drink, talking to the cute girl on the bike, looking at the clock, walking back to the bar, chalking up, adjusting the belt, talking to a friend, then doing the next set. Ten second is *ten seconds!* No cheating!

### Tabata Exercises

You need to choose an exercise that uses a large number of muscles. I suggest the front squat. Now, you may argue, why not the back squat? Well, it's hard to dump the bar quickly into the rack with back squats, while with front squats, you can simply fall into it and start your ten second rest.

With something like a military press, you won't be using enough muscles to allow you to survive in the last minute; you might only get one or two reps with your shoulders on fire. Deadlifts have been tried, but most people get a little worried about injuries doing them Tabata-style.

The front squat might be the single best Tabata lift. Having said that, if you don't know how to front squat correctly, the Tabata method might teach you to lift better than a thousand coaches. In the four minutes, it's easy to get 64 to 70 reps, which teaches the nervous system better than a PowerPoint presentation.

The bar will be held in the "front" of the body, with the fingers relaxed and the bar resting on the clavicles with the elbows high. Sit down "between the legs." This actually gets easier in the third and fourth minute as you just start to "drop" back through. As you rise back up, you don't need to lock out the knees; in fact, don't even think about it. Just get up and go back down.





Weight on the bar? Let's just say this: a guy with a 465 pound front squat puked with only 95 pounds on the Tabata front squat. Generally, I urge people to go "light," like 65 to 95 pounds the first time. There are those in this world who've gone up to 155 pounds and still got "eights" in the last twenty seconds, but those are very rare people!

The other great Tabata exercise is the "thruster." The thruster is one of the greatest lifts no one has ever heard of in the gym. Take two dumbbells and hold them at shoulder height. Squat down, keeping the dumbbells on the shoulders. As you rise up, press the bells to the overhead lockout position. You can either press as you rise or use the momentum to help "kick" the bells overhead. I find that I do a little bit of both in the four minutes.







Thrusters do things to your heart rate and breathing that I honestly can't describe. Go light! A 35 pound dumbbell in each hand is a very difficult thruster workout! Check your ego at the door for the first two minutes.

### **Tabata Tips**

You need to be able to see a wall clock with a second hand during your four minutes of fun. Stop at twenty seconds, rack the bar (if you choose the front squat), rest ten seconds, grab the bar and go again. Watching the clock seems to help with the focus.

And remember this: you really shouldn't consider doing much after the Tabata workout. Your lungs will be going like a locomotive engine. Go ahead and plan anything you like, but don't be surprised if it just doesn't happen. I keep the family dog nearby to chase the carrion birds away while I rest on the sidewalk.

The hardest thing about this workout is staying focused for four minutes. Don't let your hands leave the bar or dumbbells, if you can help it. After you put the bar in the rack during the front squat, stay right there, an inch or two back from the bar, and stare at the second hand of the clock.

If you do thrusters, put the dumbbells on a bench and watch the clock with your hands ready. This little trick of staying with the weight seems to help make those ten seconds seem like, well, not much, really! But at least you don't have to move much to get the weights again.

I do either Tabata front squats or Tabata thrusters about twice a month. I'm sure someone will comment, "If it's so good, why don't you do it every day?" Go ahead, try it and report back after the second day.

## **240 Seconds of Pain**

Why should you do this workout? The Tabata program might be the single best "fat burning workout" that I know. It might only be four minutes, but you seem to keep sweating and breathing hard for a long, long time afterwards. Moreover, it seems to teach the body the proper method of squatting far easier than all the instruction in the world.

One other thing: Tabata truly teaches a person the mental focus needed to push past pain and reach his body comp or athletic goals. It'll save you 12,000 bucks, too!

## **About the Author**

Dan John is the Diocesan Director of Religious Education for the Diocese of Salt Lake City and a full-time "on-line" religious studies instructor for Columbia College of Missouri. Originally from South San Francisco, Dan came to Utah to throw the discus for Utah State University and never left. He has Masters degrees in history and in religious education, as well as having done intensive work at the American University in Cairo, University of Haifa, and Cornell.

Currently, Dan is ranked number one in the world in the Highland Games, ages 45-49, broke the American record in the Weight Pentathlon last August, holds numerous National Championships in weightlifting and throwing and maintains a full-time free internet coaching site at <http://danjohn.org/coach>.

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