

Ratings of Perceived Exertion

Ratings of perceived exertion (RPE) are a valuable and reliable indicator in the monitoring of an individual's subjective perception of effort. The Borg RPE scale allows individuals to subjectively rate their feelings of exertion during the cardiorespiratory fitness test using a scale from 6 to 20 (roughly based on resting to maximal heart rate, i.e., 60 to 200 beats·min⁻¹).

The following are the recommended instructions for using the RPE scale during both submaximal and maximal fitness testing:

"During the fitness test we want you to pay close attention to how hard the exercise feels to you. This feeling should reflect your total amount of exertion and fatigue, combining all sensations and feeling of physical stress, effort, and fatigue. Don't concern yourself with any one factor such as leg discomfort, shortness of breath or exercise intensity, but try to concentrate on your total, inner feelings of exertion. Try not to underestimate or overestimate your feelings of exertion; be as accurate as you can."

Clinical and practical experience indicates that approximately five to 10% of individuals tend to underestimate RPE during the early and middle stages of a fitness test. It is important to use the above standard instructions with each client to reduce problems of misinterpretation of RPE.

Ratings of Perceived Exertion (RPE)

Rating	Description	How and What You Can Expect to Feel
6		
7	Very, very light	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The exercise feels fairly light or even easier.
8		
9	Very light	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Your breathing increases only slightly.
10		It is quite easy for you to keep exercising.
11	Fairly light	
12		
13	Somewhat hard	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The exercise feels somewhat hard. Your breathing is above normal. At most, it is only moderately difficult for you to continue exercising.
14		
15	Hard	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The exercise feels more than just somewhat hard.
16		
17	Very hard	It results in heavy breathing. It is difficult for you to continue exercising.
18		
19	Very, very hard	
20		