

WHERE DO I SET THE LEVER ON THE SIDE?

One of the most common, and most mis-understood aspects of using a Concept2 rowing machine is what the lever on the side does. It's not an arbitrary 'resistance' setting that just feels easy at 1 and hard at 10. There's a direct relation between this effort and how far you go. And, setting the lever to '7' on one machine will most likely feel completely different to another machine set to 7.

There are some very clear, clever articles below which describe what is known as "Drag Factor" a lot better than I can. But... I'll give it a try.

The numbers I'm about to use are wrong, but hopefully it'll help to explain the concept of Drag Factor - which is what the lever on the side controls. If it feels twice as hard, like you're using double the amount of effort at 10 than you are at 1 then the good news is that there's a relation to how far you go with one stroke. If at setting 1 on the lever you went 10m with every stroke - at 10, which takes double the effort and power (in this example only!) you're rewarded for your effort. Double the power means double the distance (20m).

So, in this example, at lever setting 1 it feels easy - but as you only go half as far as at setting 10 - you have to row two strokes to match the distance of setting 10. Therefore, expending the same amount of power to cover the same distance.

So, no matter where you set the lever, the amount of effort you need to put into cover a set distance is the same. This is why Concept2 machines are great to use when racing against each other. Everyone can set the lever to where they wish, and it's still an even field.

But this doesn't clear up WHERE to put the lever. This is where "Drag Factor" comes in. This is the number given to the level of force you have to put in.

You access this display by choosing "More Options" from the main menu on the PM3/4/5 monitor - then "Display Drag Factor". Most clean or new machines should give around 90 at setting one and about 200 at setting 10. It's thought that a setting of 130 is similar to the feel of rowing on the water for men - and around 115 for women. But that doesn't mean it's where you have to set your Drag Factor. It's a personal choice, often something that you'll spend a lot of time experimenting with. Some people will set it to 130 for their general rowing, but increase to 160 or higher if they're doing short sprints.

A low drag factor (120 or lower) will reveal poor technique quite clearly, whereas higher drag factors can mask a poor technique - overcoming it with sheer muscle power - but the pay off for that is quicker muscle fatigue.

Here's some proper articles about this from people who spent a lot more time than I just did in that example above!

[Concept 2 Description](#)

HOW SHOULD I SET UP THE FOOTPLATE?

Another personal preference. Standard wisdom suggests setting it so that when you tighten the strap, it goes across the bottom lace of your shoe.

Some people find this doesn't suit them though – either because they don't have the flexibility, or because they have long shins, meaning they have to set the footplate lower. Add to this that some find they set the footplate higher when sprinting than they do when doing longer distances, and it's something you will need to get a feel for. Start with the 'strap over lace' idea – and move on from there.

The Concept2 UK website has a great article from coach / author Sam Loch about this. [Click here](#) to go visit.

DO I NEED TO USE A CONCEPT2 ROWING MACHINE?

For these plans yes and all the pacing guides are based on it.

But if you just want to get fit and see rowing as a good way to do it – and you have a machine you know will let you reach this goal, then there's no real reason not to use it. Lastability, effectiveness etc all come into play – but if it's just you on a machine with no desire to connect with the outside world, anything will do.

What does 4km R18 @2km + 20. X 3/rest 2m mean?

- **4K** means that they rowed 4000m
- **@ 2K+20** means that the pace for 500m shown on the monitor was 8 seconds slower than their average pace for their fastest 2000m effort (so for a 8:00 2K – the average would be 2:00 – therefore 2K + 20 would be 2:20)
- **R18** means at 18 strokes per minute
- **X3 / rest 2m** means that they did it three times, with a 2 minute rest period between each effort.

Some people write these things slightly differently (r3 instead of 3r for example) but if you know the basic thinking behind this code, it's pretty simple to decipher the nuances.

Setting the PM5 monitor in more depth can be seen here.

<https://www.concept2.com/service/monitors/pm5/how-to-use/understanding-workout-types>

I WANT TO GET FASTER; HOW DO I DO THAT?

A lot of this depends on where you're coming from. If you've just started, then time spend on the erg will get your fitter, stronger – and therefore faster. But if you've spend a bit of time on it, and feel you're not getting faster quick enough, the first thing to address is if there are any issues with your technique. Lots of information exists on the internet about technique on the rowing machine. Videos and articles will talk you through the whole of the stroke and what you're supposed to be doing in a perfect world. But nothing beats filming yourself (from the side) and posting it somewhere like the Concept2 Rowing Hub on Facebook – and asking for technique advice.

Finally, if you have the time, money and option of finding someone, personal coaching is a sure way to get faster. Internet plans are great – but require you to have a lot of self-discipline to keep pushing hard on every session (which is one reason why plans from Fitness Matters are so effective, as they're based around a community of other people doing the same sessions). If you have someone coaching you, pushing you, and stopping you from easing off, often you can squeeze more out of your sessions that if you were on your own. We also offer 1-2-1 personal and remote coaching. <https://fmrowing.com/virtual-coaching/>

LOW RATE OR HIGH RATE?

Both. They both have their training value. Low rates generate power, help you with concentrating on proper form and can build a 'strong engine' (foundation) for everything else you do on the erg. High rates get you towards an anaerobic state, where you start to push your self harder and go faster and develop speed.

One of my favourite phrases is that you should be 'smart at low rate' (build your foundation) and 'bold at high rate' (don't give up when it gets tough. And one thing to think about is that if you can generate a lot of power at low rate – how fast would you be if you could lay down that power at a high rate?)

SHOULD I DO WEIGHTS AS WELL AS ROWING?

Resistance training is of benefit whether you row or not. However, this question is probably better answered by saying that it's better for your rowing if you choose exercises that supplement and improve your training on the erg. I wrote an article on the topic here

<https://www.fitnessmatters.me.uk/weight-training-indoor-rowing/>

SHOULD I LISTEN TO MUSIC?

It sure can help make the longer rows less lonely! Energetic, inspirational music can give you a kick when you're going hard – and there are a few applications that will let you alter the beats per minute of your music so you can set up a playlist that matches your stroke rate. If you want to row at 32spm, that means playing music at 128bpm and rowing in time with the music.

A word of warning though – don't play music any louder than you need to. Tinnitus is a terrible result of playing music too loud for too long. Be sensible – just keep it loud enough to hear over the fan noise or music in the gym etc.

WHAT'S HD?

This is a case of you don't want to know. Giving this a name legitimises it as an option. Last chance to not read on....

It stands for 'Handle Down' – when you give up on a row and stop. Make every effort not to do this. It may be painful now, but not as painful as knowing you quit. If you want to get faster, you don't HD.

OUCH! MY BACKSIDE HURTS WHEN I ROW!!!!

Some of this could be just because you are new to rowing or down to your technique, but before you go to eBay and start looking at new padded shorts / new rowing machines etc, have a read of [Concept 2's own page on this sensitive matter](#).