

## Selecting and Effectively Using

# A Health/Fitness Facility

## Programs

The health/fitness facility should provide a variety of equipment and programs to meet your personal fitness goals and interests. First, establish your exercise/fitness goals, then talk to personnel to see if they provide the programs and/or equipment in which you are interested. Consider the following:

- Does the facility offer the type of exercise or program in which you are interested (i.e., personal training, aerobics, spinning, martial arts, strength training, yoga, Pilates, etc.)?
- Do qualified exercise instructors develop the programs?
- Will staff members modify the programs to meet your needs?
- Does the facility offer programs to address medical conditions (i.e., weight loss, diabetes, hypertension, or smoking cessation)?
- Does the facility offer programs for the age group in which you are interested (i.e., elderly, adolescents, children, infants)?
- Does the facility offer fitness assessments and a personalized exercise program or prescription?

## Special Needs

The facility may or may not be able to accommodate your special needs. Ask questions to see if the staff of the health/fitness facility can meet your needs regarding modification of equipment, facilities, and/or programs. If you are interested in a rehabilitation program, check to see if such programs are available and check with an appropriate medical doctor for recommendations regarding programming.

The facility should conform to all relevant laws, regulations, and published standards, including United States federal laws (ADA and OSHA), local government laws and regulations (local health departments), and local building codes and ordinances.

## Business Practices

Joining a health/fitness facility is an investment in your health, fitness, and quality of life. Purchasing a membership is also an investment of time and money. You want to make sure the facility has a good reputation, and is well respected by its members. Consider how the facility is operated before signing a contract.

- Does the staff pressure you into purchasing a membership?
- Does the membership fee fit into your budget?
- Is there a trial membership program?
- Is there a grace period in which you can cancel your membership and receive a refund?
- Are there different membership options and are all the fees for services posted?

- Does the facility provide you with a written set of rules and policies, which govern the responsibilities of members as well as the facility?
- Does the facility have a procedure to inform members of any changes in charges, services, or policies?
- Make sure you read and understand everything before signing a contract. Do not rely on verbal responses.

## Important Points to Remember

Ask a lot of questions so that you will have accurate information. Making an informed decision can help you avoid choosing a facility that does not fit your needs, and ends up costing you money.

There are many considerations that you should investigate prior to joining a health/fitness facility. These considerations do not ensure the health/fitness facility will be risk free or that you will be satisfied with the program(s). But, these guidelines can help you make a decision based upon industry standards.

Your exercise program should be part of your lifestyle, and the facility you choose can play a major role in the success of your program. Selecting a facility with professional and qualified staff, state-of-the-art equipment, and a variety of programs is a sound investment of your money and in your health.

### A Complete Physical Activity Program

A rounded program of physical activity includes aerobic exercise, strength training exercise and flexibility training—but not necessarily in the same session. Create a pattern that you'll stick to and that fits into your schedule. Commitment to regular physical activity is more important than the intensity of the workouts. Choose exercises you are likely to enjoy. ACSM's Position Stand "The Recommended Quantity and Quality of Exercise for... Healthy Adults" ©1998 states that aerobic training should be performed three to five days per week for a minimum of 20 minutes per day. Remember, it's better to exercise for a shorter period of time than not at all. Typical aerobic exercises include walking and running (or treadmills), stair climbing, cycling on a stationary or moving bike, rowing, cross-country skiing, and swimming. Many devices offer a combination of these motions. Generally, strength training should be done two to three times per week, using flexible rubber resistance, free weights or weight machines. For general training, do two to three upper-body and lower-body exercises. Abdominal exercises are an important part of strength training. Flexibility training is important and frequently neglected, resulting in increased tightness as we age and become less active. Stretch with sustained gradual movements lasting at least 15 seconds per stretch. At a minimum, try to stretch every day.

ACSM grants permission to reproduce this brochure, if it is reproduced in its entirety without alteration. The text may be reproduced in another publication if it is used in its entirety without alteration and the following statement added: Reprinted with permission of the American College of Sports Medicine. Copyright © 2005 American College of Sports Medicine. This brochure is a product of ACSM's Consumer Products Committee.

**AMERICAN COLLEGE  
of SPORTS MEDICINE**  
www.acsm.org



**AMERICAN COLLEGE  
of SPORTS MEDICINE**  
www.acsm.org

ACSM... Advancing Health through  
Science, Fitness and Medicine

## Staying Active Pays Off!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that even moderate physical activity—such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking—significantly contributes to longevity. A physically active person with such risk factors as high blood pressure, diabetes or even a smoking habit can get real benefits from regular physical activity as part of daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can help you stay on a diet and lose weight. What's more, regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones.

## The First Step

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, make sure to answer the following questions. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine your suitability for beginning an exercise routine or program.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition or that you should participate in physical activity only as recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest during physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance because of dizziness? Do you ever lose consciousness?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or a heart condition?
- Do you know of any reason you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered yes to one or more questions, if you are over 40 years of age and have been inactive, or if you are concerned about your health, consult a physician before taking a fitness test or substantially increasing your physical activity. If you answered no to each question, then it's likely that you can safely begin fitness testing and training.

## Selecting a Facility

According to the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IHRSA), there are more than 17,000 health clubs in the United States with a membership representing more than 33 million individuals. These facilities can offer an attractive, safe, and effective venue for exercise and health promotion. The quality of the facilities, staffing, and programs vary greatly; therefore, you will want to evaluate the facility before making your decision. It is important to understand that you could actually be putting yourself at risk of harm if you select a facility that does not provide a safe environment, adequate screening, a

properly trained staff, and safe programs. This brochure was developed to help you make an informed decision.

## Benefits of a Health/Fitness Facility

A quality health/fitness facility will allow you the opportunity to exercise in a safe environment under the direction of qualified personnel. It will also allow you the opportunity to use state-of-the-art exercise equipment and participate in any number of beneficial activity programs. Group exercise programs will afford you the opportunity to meet new people and exercise in a social environment.

## Before Joining

It is strongly suggested that you shop around and visit several facilities prior to making your investment. Some facilities offer a trial membership for a day or a week. Before joining, take a tour and ask questions. Observe the classes and/or programs. Take notes on what you like and dislike regarding the facility. You should consider whether the facility is located in an area that is convenient for you.

## Safety

The staff of the facility should be able to respond to any reasonable and foreseeable emergency situation that threatens the safety of its members. Staff should also provide you with any information regarding potential risks associated with using the facility. Check for these safety features:

- Does the facility have a posted emergency response/evacuation plan?
- Is staff qualified to execute the emergency response/evacuation plan?
- Does the facility have automated external defibrillator(s) (AED) on-site? These devices can be used to aid someone suffering a cardiac arrest.
- Is the facility clean and well maintained?
- Is the facility free from physical or environmental hazards?
- Is the facility appropriately lit?
- Does the facility have adequate heating, cooling, and ventilation?
- Does the facility have adequate parking, especially at peak times?

## Preactivity Screening

Every adult member should be offered a preactivity screening. Check to see if the facility provides for or adheres to the following:

- Does the facility offer a preactivity screening, such as the PAR-Q, to assess whether members have medical conditions or risk factors that should be addressed by a physician?
- Aside from an initial general health and wellness screening, does the facility have a health and

fitness screening method appropriate for the type of exercise you will undertake?

- Does the facility offer fitness assessments?

## Personnel

The facility should have a professional staff that has the appropriate education and training related to the duties they perform. Professional qualifications optimally should include a college degree in a health-related field such as exercise science, physical education, or kinesiology. Additionally, staff should hold an exercise certification from a nationally-recognized, preferably non-profit organization such as the American College of Sports Medicine. Any certification should be based upon job-related performance criteria which have been validated by scientific research in the field and analyzed for reliability and validity. Many certification programs do not comply with the industry standards, so when asking what certifications facility staff possess, remember to inquire about how the certification examination was developed and administered and what the prerequisites were for participating in the certification program. Check to make sure the credentials and education are from credible institutions for not only the personal trainers, but also the supervisors and managers of the facility.

Checklist for personnel:

Do staff members have appropriate education, certification, and/or training that is recognized by the industry and the public as representing a high level of competence and credibility?

- Is there sufficient staff on-site?
- Are staff members easy to recognize? Do they wear name tags?
- Are the staff members friendly and helpful?
- Do staff members receive ongoing professional training?
- Do staff members provide each new member with an orientation as to instruction in using the equipment and/or facility?
- Are the staff members trained in CPR, in the use of AEDs, and in first aid?
- Are staff knowledgeable about my health conditions?
- Can staff help me set realistic exercise goals?

## Youth Services

There are important considerations for facilities which offer youth programs. Youth programs should be appropriately supervised at all times. In certain parts of the country, background screening, specific training and/or licensure is required. Check to make sure that the facility provides for your needs regarding childcare and/or youth programs.