



## ACSM Information On...

# Selecting and Effectively Using A Health/Fitness Facility

The health/fitness facility should provide a variety of equipment and programs to meet your personal fitness goals and interests. First, be sure to establish your exercise/fitness goals before talking to personnel to see if they provide the programs and equipment you seek.

### A COMPLETE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAM

A well-rounded physical activity program includes aerobic exercise and strength training exercise, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and overall health and function. Regular physical activity will provide more health benefits than sporadic, high intensity workouts, so choose exercises you are likely to enjoy and that you can incorporate into your schedule.

ACSM's physical activity recommendations for healthy adults, updated in 2011, recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) five days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation.

Examples of typical aerobic exercises are:

- Walking
- Running
- Stair climbing
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Cross country skiing
- Swimming.

In addition, strength training should be performed a minimum of two days each week, with 8-12 repetitions of 8-10 different exercises that target all major muscle groups. This type of training can be accomplished using body weight, resistance bands, free weights, medicine balls or weight machines.

### SELECTING A FACILITY

According to the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IHRSA), there are more than 17,000 health clubs in the U.S. 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 thoroughly evaluate the facility before making your decision. The facility should conform to all relevant laws, regulations, and published standards, including U.S. federal laws (ADA and OSHA), local government laws and regulations and local building codes and ordinances.

A quality facility provides a safe environment for exercise. It will allow you to use state-of-the-art exercise equipment and participate in any number of activity programs. Group exercise programs will give you opportunities to meet new people and exercise in a social environment.

### BEFORE JOINING

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 programs. Take into consideration whether the facility is located in an area that is convenient for you. Also, consider the following:

- Does the facility offer the type of exercise or program in which you are interested?
- 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?
- Does the facility offer programs for the age group in which you are interested?
- Does the facility offer fitness assessments and a personalized exercise program or prescription?

### SAFETY

The staff of the facility should be able to respond to any reasonable 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 defibrillators (AEDs) onsite?

- 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?

### PRE-ACTIVITY SCREENING

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

- Does the facility offer a pre-activity 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?

### SPECIAL NEEDS

If you have special needs, it is important to see if the staff of the facility can meet your needs regarding modification of equipment, facilities and programs.

### PERSONNEL AND CERTIFICATION

The facility should have a professional staff that has the appropriate education and training related to their duties. Professional qualifications should include a college degree in a health-related field such as exercise science, physical education or kinesiology. Additionally, staff members should hold a certification from a nationally recognized 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. Many certification programs do not comply with industry standards. It is important 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 entire staff has credentials and education from credible institutions.

### CHECKLIST FOR PERSONNEL:

- Do staff members have appropriate education, certification and training 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?
- Are the staff members friendly and helpful?
- Do staff members receive ongoing professional training?
- Do staff members provide each new member with an orientation to the equipment and/or facility?
- Are the staff members trained in CPR, in the use of AEDs and in first aid?
- Are the staff members knowledgeable about your health conditions?
- Can staff help me set realistic exercise goals?

### YOUTH SERVICES

If you are interested in a facility with youth programs, they should be appropriately supervised at all times. In certain parts of the country, background screening, specific training and licensure is required. Check to make sure that the facility meets your needs regarding childcare and youth programs.

### BUSINESS PRACTICES

Before signing a contract, consider the following:

- 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.

Ask a lot of questions so that you will have accurate information when you are making a decision.

Making an informed decision can help you avoid choosing a facility that does not fit your needs. 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.

### STAYING ACTIVE PAYS OFF!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that moderate physical activity – such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking – significantly contributes to longevity. Even a person with risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes or even a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their 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 if you're ready to begin 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 from 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 recently 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 exercising.

### PRIOR TO EXERCISE

Prior to beginning any exercise program, including the activities depicted in this brochure, individuals should seek medical evaluation and clearance to engage in activity. Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone, and some programs may result in injury. Activities should be carried out at a pace that is comfortable for the user. Users should discontinue participation in any exercise activity that causes pain or discomfort. In such event, medical consultation should be immediately obtained.



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