

Selecting the Right Fitness Facility for You

Prior to joining a health/fitness facility, you are encouraged to identify your major fitness and exercise goals. With fitness objectives established, start visiting fitness facilities that are easy access for you and your family (if you are seeking a family fitness membership). The fitness club should have a variety of exercise equipment and fitness programs to meet your personal health and wellness interests.

Selecting A Facility

According to the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IHRSA), there are more than 38,000 health clubs in the U.S., with memberships representing more than 60 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 fitness equipment should be modern, clean and in working condition. The overall cleanliness of the fitness club as well as the value of services provided are important considerations.

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 physical activity programs. Group exercise programs will give you opportunities to meet new people and exercise in a social environment. Having personal trainers accessible provides you the opportunity to learn proper exercise techniques and progressions.

Before Joining

Visit several facilities prior to making your investment. Some facilities offer a trial membership for a day or a week. Take a tour through the club and ask several questions. Observe the classes, programs and personal trainers (if possible, from afar, so as not to interrupt their training). 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 group exercise or program(s) you are seeking? Are there additional fees for these extra classes and programs?
- Does the facility have the type of equipment you want to use? For instance, having a variety of exercise equipment and free weights offers a great variety for fitness programming.
- Do certified exercise professionals develop personal exercise programs and help you with your fitness goals? Is there a fee for this service?
- What are the rates for hiring a personal trainer on a regular basis?
- Are qualified professionals regularly available for learning how to properly use equipment for your specific needs?
- Does the facility offer programs to address medical conditions, such as for diabetes prevention or blood pressure management?
- Does the facility offer programs for the age groups in which you are interested?

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 the staff qualified to execute the emergency response evacuation plan?
- Does the facility have automated external defibrillators (AEDs) onsite?
- Is the facility well maintained, with safe walking paths through equipment areas?
- Does the facility appear safe from physical or environmental hazards?
- Is the facility lighting bright and clear in areas of equipment use and where dynamic exercise programs are taught?
- Does the facility have adequate heating, cooling and ventilation?
- Does the facility have adequate parking? It is safe from vandalism?

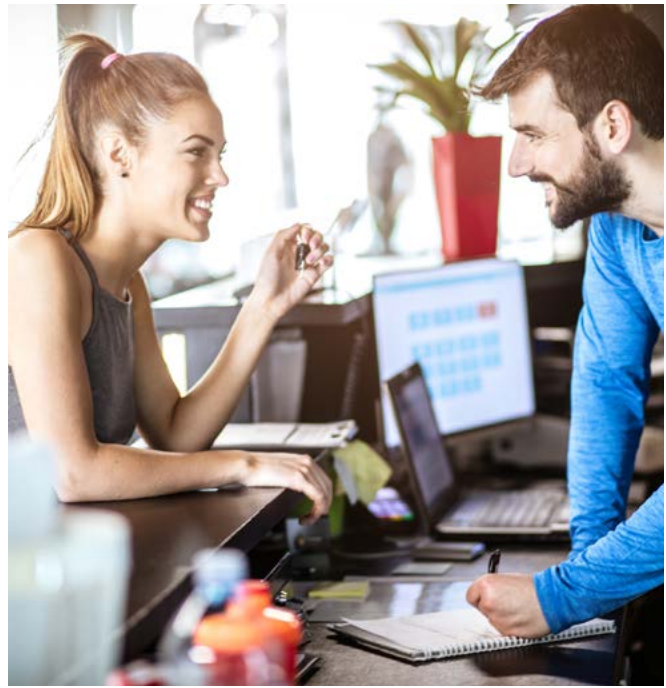
Pre-Activity Screening

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 qualified health professional?
- 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 (perhaps for a fee) such as aerobic capacity and body composition evaluations?

Special Needs

If you have special needs, it is important to ask 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. Inquire if any staff have professional qualifications, such as a college degree in a health-related field such as exercise science or physical education. Additionally, fitness instructors and personal trainers should hold a certification from a nationally recognized organization such as the American College of Sports Medicine. Some certification programs do not comply with industry standards. Check to make sure the teaching and training professionals have credentials and education from credible institutions. Inquire whether the instructors are maintaining their credentials with ongoing professional training.

Other Facility and Programming Points to Check

- Are there sufficient professional staff on site helping the members?
- Are staff members easy to recognize?
- Are all fitness facility staff, faculty and instructors friendly and helpful?
- Do staff members provide each new member with an orientation to the equipment and/or facility?
- Are all fitness facility staff members trained in CPR, in the use of AEDs and in first aid?
- If you have a specific health condition, are there any fitness facility professionals knowledgeable about your health conditions?

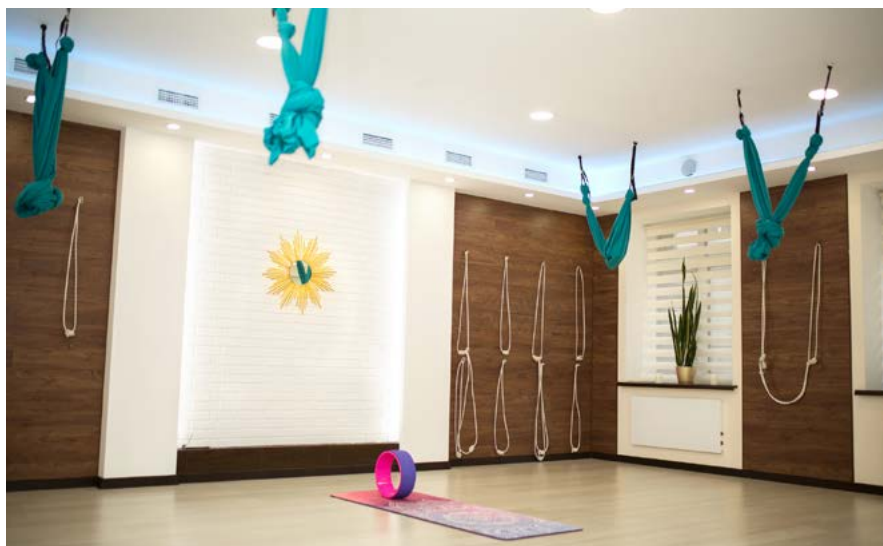
Youth Services

If you are interested in a facility with youth programs, make certain youth will 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.

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

Making an informed decision can help you choose a fitness facility that meets 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 a longer life. Even a person with health risk factors like high blood pressure, depression, diabetes or a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can also help you achieve weight loss goals. What's more, regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones. Exercise helps improve your mental well-being too.

A Complete Physical Activity Program

Regular physical activity provides many health benefits. While it's not required, working with an exercise professional can help you reach your fitness goals, tailor exercises to your abilities and most importantly, minimize your risk of injury. You should expect the exercise professional to ask you to fill out an exercise pre-participation health screening. This form will ask if you exercise regularly and if you have any health concerns that should prompt you to see your healthcare provider before getting started. The following precautions will help you safely participate in exercise programs:

If you DO NOT exercise regularly:

If you have not been diagnosed by a doctor with, AND do not have signs or symptoms of cardiovascular, metabolic or kidney disease, THEN you can start right away with light to moderate intensity exercise. You can gradually build up to vigorous exercise if you stay free of any symptoms of health problems.

If you have ever been diagnosed by a doctor, with OR have signs/symptoms of cardiovascular, metabolic or kidney disease, THEN it is recommended to seek medical clearance before beginning an exercise program. Once you get medical clearance, you should start with light to moderate intensity. You can gradually build up to vigorous exercise if you stay free of any symptoms of health problems.

If you DO exercise regularly:

If you have not been diagnosed with, AND do not have signs or symptoms of cardiovascular, metabolic, or kidney disease, you can continue with moderate exercise or gradually build to vigorous exercise intensity.

If you have been diagnosed with cardiovascular, metabolic, or kidney disease AND do not have any sign/symptoms of health problems, then you can continue exercising at a moderate intensity. If you received medical clearance within the last 12 months AND your symptoms have not changed, then you can continue with moderate exercise or gradually build to vigorous exercise intensity.

If at any time you develop a sign or symptom of cardiovascular, metabolic or kidney disease, discontinue exercise and seek a doctor's clearance right away. Then, after getting medical clearance, you may continue your moderate intensity exercise program and gradually progress your effort.

Getting Started with an Exercise Program

A well-rounded exercise program includes aerobic, strength training exercises, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve overall health and function. So, it is important to choose exercises you enjoy and can fit into your schedule.

Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone. Activities should be carried out at an effort level that is comfortable for you. You should stop participation in any exercise activity that causes pain. In such event, you should consult with your health care professional immediately.

ACSM recommends you accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) most 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 and swimming. Examples of common strength training exercises are: weight machines, free weights and resistance bands. Flexibility exercises can include: stretches of muscles around different joints and yoga.

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