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Deciding on a Fitness Center: Tips for Choosing

By Conray Knox

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Joining one of the many fitness centers in your area can have a lot of benefits, but can also be a big expense. Since most centers ask you to sign contracts that can be difficult to cancel, make sure that joining a fitness center is for you and that you are happy with the one you choose, before signing on the dotted line.

Deciding on your Needs

Since you are reading this I guess you would be more interested in weight training than aerobics, swimming and other things. Now those are important but it does not matter to some people whether there is a swimming pool available. You might not be concerned with the number of aerobics classes held each day.

All you want to do is weight train. So choosing a gym that has a wide variety of exercise equipment is idea for you. Now if you are still not sure, you need to look for a location that has a variety of programs and exercise equipment. Maybe once you get started you can decide on your specific needs.

Shop Around

There are many fitness centers out there, too many to review individually. But keep in mind that they are not all alike. If you want to join, make sure to find a club that suits you. Do your homework and comparison shop-it will definitely be to your advantage. Here's what to look for:

- * Make sure it's convenient to work and/or home. If it's not, you won't go.
- * Request a free or guest pass to try out the facility.
- * Ask about the qualifications of the staff. Unless you already know what you're doing, you want to work with professionals.

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- * Visit your choices during the times you would most likely go to exercise and check for crowding conditions.
- * Check out the cleanliness of the exercise areas as well as the locker rooms and bathrooms. Make sure exercise equipment appears to be in good condition.
- * Ask for operating hours and class schedules to make sure they fit your needs.
- * See if child care is available on site.
- * Talk to other members and see how they like it.

Joining a fitness center can be a major expense, so use these tips to avoid any financial surprises and get the most for your dollar.

- * Before you shop, determine how much you're willing to spend. Don't go above this amount. Working out should not break the bank.
- * Find out exactly what is included in the monthly fee and what is considered "extra." Be sure to get a price list of services.
- * Skip low-cost "trial memberships." You will most certainly be pressured later on to continue at a higher fee. Don't join until you're ready to make the commitment and only pay what you're willing to pay.
- * See if you are eligible for discounts through your employer or health insurance company.
- * Completely understand all refund and cancellation policies before signing a contract.
- * Review the contract at home, without the pressure of a salesperson. Ask questions and make sure you understand what you're signing.

The Benefits of Joining

Fitness clubs allow you access to equipment that you could not afford to purchase or have no room for at home. Many also offer a variety of classes led by trained professionals, therefore increasing the variety of exercise options available. You also have access to fitness professionals who can provide guidance and help you develop a personalized weight training program.

For those who HATE to waste money, joining a fitness center can be a good motivator, feeling compelled to go so they get their money's worth (this is true only for those who really go out of their way to get value from their money, no matter what they're spending it on). Those who would just be constantly interrupted trying to work out at home may find getting out of the house to exercise the only way to go.

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Alternatives to Fitness Centers

Remember, the large fitness center chains are not the only way to go. Some employers as well as local hospitals or wellness centers have fitness facilities.

Also, make sure this is the best value for you. A few hundred dollars investment in work out equipment you can use at home will still give you excellent fitness results. Or you could join a fitness class through your local YMCA or community center, where membership is not required.

Conray Knox is the owner and webmaster of

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Factors to Consider when choosing a Fitness Club

By Renee Kennedy

Factors to Consider when choosing a Fitness Club by Renee Kennedy

There are several details that must be taken into account if you are looking to join a health club or fitness center:

Convenience/Location is probably the most important consideration. If the health club you choose to join is not convenient to your home or work, how long do you think it will take before you decide to skip a couple sessions, especially in bad weather?

Price may also be a factor for you.

How much do you know about working out? If you know a lot about strength training, aerobics, flexibility, etc. you may want to join a club where you can develop your own individualized program. If you know nothing about physical fitness, it may be much better for you to join a club that offers a standardized program.

Your specific goals may also have a big influence on your choice. If you need to tone up, perhaps a Pilates class may be the answer for you. If you are trying to buff up, you may wish to join a health club that offers a strength-training program.

Where are your friends going? There's no better motivation than working out with a friend. You may get to know some people once you join and that's a good thing... but if you choose a place where a friend already goes, it may be easier for you to adjust. It's a lot more fun when you feel comfortable and have someone to talk to.

What is your gender and age? There are fitness places geared toward a specific gender. For instance,

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"Curves" and "Ladies Workout Express" are only for women. Go to each fitness center within a reasonable driving distance of your work or home and ask them for a tour. Look at the people that are working out, are those people like you? Do you look like you would fit in with these people? "Fitting in" will also motivate you to keep going.

Time is also a consideration. Is your fitness center open during times that are convenient for your schedule?

Do you need childcare? Many fitness clubs offer childcare.

Will the staff meet your needs? If you are joining to lose weight, you may want a nutritionist on staff. Maybe you feel you need a certified personal trainer to keep you on track. Also, will there always be a staff member around to help you learn the equipment?

The fitness center may have a contract. Read this contract or ask questions about it. Some good questions to ask...

Are there any up-front fees?

What is the duration of the contract?

Is there any way to get out of the contract if I need to?

What exactly does the membership fee cover? For instance, will it cover childcare, use of the pool, locker, towels, etc.

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