

## The Importance and Benefits of Physical Activity

It has been firmly established that individuals who engage in some form of physical activity, either by lifestyle or occupation, are likely to live longer and healthier lives. Research shows that even moderate caloric expenditure from physical activity has a significant impact on longevity. A physically active person who possesses risk factors like hypertension, diabetes, and even a smoking habit can derive significant gains from incorporating regular physical activity into his/her daily activities.

Regular physical activity is also likely to help modify a number of risk factors. As an adjunct to weight loss, exercise is likely to help you stay on a diet and lose weight. Additionally, regular exercise is associated with reductions in blood pressure, improved glucose regulation, promotion of better lipid profiles, and stronger, denser bones.

### The First Step!

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, answer the questions below. 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 and that you should only participate in physical activity 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, or 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 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, you have reasonable assurance of your suitability for 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.

## 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

There are three principal components to a rounded program of physical activity: aerobic exercise, strength training exercise, and flexibility training. It is not essential that all three components be performed during the same workout session. Try to create a pattern that fits into your schedule and one to which you can adhere. Commitment to a regular physical activity program is more important than intensity of the workouts. Therefore, choose exercises you believe you are likely to pursue and 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 with a minimum of 20 minutes per day. Remember, if your schedule is tight, it is better to exercise for a shorter period of time than not at all. Typical forms of aerobic exercise are walking and running (treadmills), stair climbing, bicycling (bicycle ergometers), rowing, cross-country skiing, and swimming. Many devices offer a combination of these motions. For general purposes, strength training should be done two to three times per week. Strength training is performed with free weights or weight machines. For the purposes of general training, two to three upper body and lower body exercises should be done. Additionally, 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. Stretching is most safely done with sustained gradual movements lasting a minimum of 15 seconds per stretch. At a minimum, strive to stretch every day.

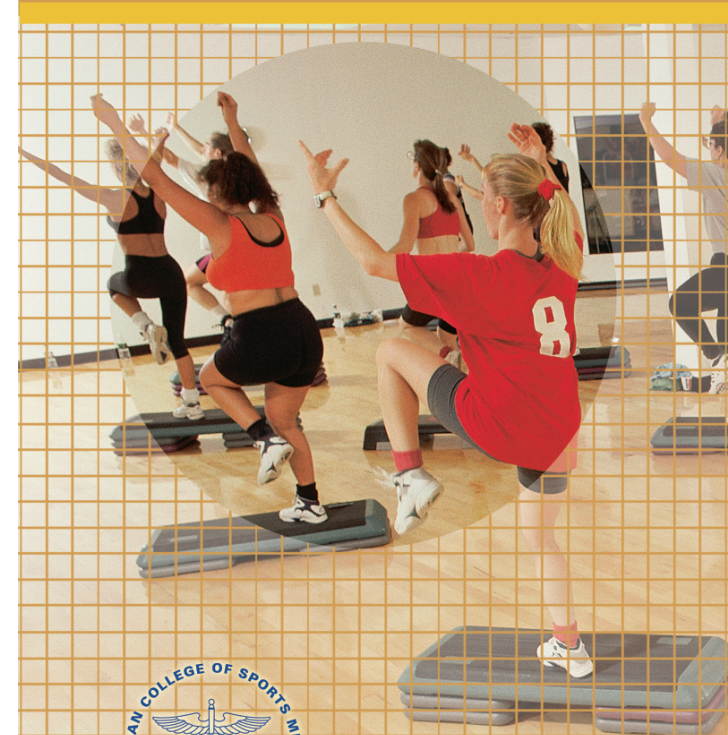
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Selecting and  
Effectively Using A

# Health/ Fitness Facility



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