

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, high cholesterol, 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.

Benefits of a Personal Trainer

A qualified and properly trained personal trainer can help you safely start and maintain an effective exercise program. A personal trainer will understand your “fitness goals” and help you achieve them. A personal trainer can be a great source of motivation and encouragement, as well as a resource for the latest objective health and fitness information. He or she can also help you fit exercise into your busy schedule and teach you how to make the most out of your time in the gym.

But beware! The title “personal trainer” does not guarantee that a person is qualified to do the job. Currently there is no national standard or minimum requirement for carrying this job title. Working with an under-qualified trainer could actually threaten your safety. This brochure will arm you with the knowledge of what to look for when seeking a personal trainer that is educated, qualified, and most-importantly, right for you!

Locating a Personal Trainer

Begin by asking about personal trainers at a health club or fitness facility. Many fitness facilities have in-house personal trainers, which you can use. Consult www.acsm.org or call ACSM at (317) 637-9200 to ask about the appropriate qualifications for personal trainers. Also at www.acsm.org, you can find ACSM's Pro Finder, an online database of ACSM-certified professionals. Personal trainers will also be listed in the phone book under such headings as: “Personal Trainers,” “Health Clubs,” “Exercise,” and “Physical Fitness.”

Choosing A Personal Trainer: Certification and Education

- Does the personal trainer hold a four-year degree (from an accredited university) in Exercise Science, Kinesiology, Exercise Physiology, Physical Education, or a related health and fitness field? A trainer with a degree in one of these areas will have a better understanding of the body and how it responds to exercise.
- Does the personal trainer have additional training and a certification by a nationally-recognized organization, preferably a not-for-profit organization?
- What continuing education is required to maintain the certification?
- Is the trainer certified in first aid and CPR?
- Does the trainer have liability insurance?

All certifications should be obtained from a nationally-recognized organization and based on job-related performance criteria, which has been validated by scientific research in the field. There are many certifying organizations that do not comply with industry standards. **Ask about the trainer's educational background and professional certifications.** Check to make sure the certification is from a credible and reputable organization.

Experience and References

- How long has he or she been a personal trainer?
- What types of clients does he or she work with?
- Can he or she provide you with an updated resume?
- Can he or she provide you with a list of references?
- The trainer should have more education and experience than just having been a “weight lifter,” a “body builder,” or “active in fitness.”

Safety and Pre-activity Screening: Client Evaluation

The trainer should be able to respond to any reasonable and foreseeable emergency situation that threatens the safety of a client. The trainer should be able to provide information regarding potential risks associated with exercise.

- Every client should be offered a pre-activity screening that is appropriate for the activity he or she will perform.
- Every client should be screened before training to assess whether he or she has medical conditions or risk factors that should be addressed by a physician.
- Does the trainer offer fitness assessments?
- Does the trainer ask specific questions, before the exercise program begins, about medical conditions, medications currently being taken, previous injuries, and surgery as it relates to exercise, and aches and pains?

Resource Network

Does the trainer have a network of other health professionals he or she works with? The trainer should be aligned with other health professionals as sources for answering specific questions and for referrals outside his or her area of expertise.

Some of the health professionals a personal trainer can be aligned with include: physicians, physical therapists, nutrition specialists, and other professionals with expertise in fitness.

Personality and Gender

- Would you prefer a male or female trainer?
- Do you like the trainer's personality? Will he or she be a good fit for your personality and your fitness goals?
- Is the trainer friendly and open to answering questions?
- Does the trainer communicate well and explain exercises in an easy-to-understand manner.
- Will the trainer motivate you to exercise and make you want to continue your program?
- The trainer should motivate you without being intimidating or pushing you beyond reasonable fitness limits.
- Is the trainer sensitive to your needs?
- Are you comfortable with the trainer?

Personal Training for Children and Adolescents

If you are choosing a personal trainer for your son or daughter, the trainer should have a good understanding of the unique characteristics of young people.

- Does he or she relate and communicate well with young people?
- Has he or she trained young athletes before?
- Is the trainer aware of special sports medicine needs and training precautions for young athletes?
- Does the trainer understand the specific needs for the sport in which your son or daughter participates? At the same time, does the trainer advocate a well-rounded fitness program?
- If your son or daughter is not an athlete and just wants “to get into shape,” does the trainer understand the guidelines for training young people?

Fees

- What does the personal trainer charge?
- How long is each session?
- What services are included in the price?
- Is there an additional “gym membership” fee?
- Are there “package” or long-term package prices?
- Does the trainer require you to sign a contract for long-term training?

The fees personal trainers charge may vary according to qualifications, experience, location, length of session, and sometimes the specialization of the work-out. Typically, a personal trainer will charge \$20 to \$100 an hour. Some trainers will offer reduced hourly rates for long-term packages or prepaid sessions.

Scheduling, Cancellation Policies & Business Practices

- Is the trainer available to meet your schedule?
- What is the cancellation policy?
- Will you be charged if you do not cancel within a certain time frame?

The trainer should provide you with a written copy of all policies on contracts, billing, scheduling, and cancellations.

Hiring a personal trainer is an investment in your health, fitness, and your quality of life, as well as an investment of time and money. Make sure the trainer has a good reputation, proper education and certification(s), and is well respected by other trainers and clients.

The trainer should conform to all relevant laws, regulations, and published standards, including United States federal laws (ADA and OSHA), and local government laws and regulations.

Special Needs

The trainer may or may not be able to accommodate special needs. Ask questions to see if he or she can meet your needs regarding modification of equipment and/or programs.

Important Points to Remember:

Ask a lot of questions so that you will have accurate information. Making an informed decision can help you avoid making a wrong decision, which may end up costing you money.

There are many considerations that you should investigate prior to hiring a personal trainer. These considerations do not ensure the exercise program with a personal trainer will be risk-free, or that you will be satisfied with the trainer or 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 trainer you choose can play a major role in the success of your program. Selecting a professional and qualified personal trainer is a sound investment for 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 the 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

Personal Trainer

