
Physical activity - choosing a provider

Summary

- Do your homework before you sign up for a centre membership, class or course.
 - Reputable centres tend to be members of Fitness Australia, or are run by the YMCA, local council or another management organisation. They should operate in accordance with the code of ethics and business practice developed by industry and government.
 - Try it out first to see if you are comfortable with the activity, the approach, and the level of support.
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Physical activity is great for your body and your mind. To keep active, it helps if you choose an activity that is enjoyable and convenient. There are heaps of activities and sports to choose from and most cater to people of all ages and abilities – you don't need to be an elite athlete.

There are likely to be lots of choices in your local community – gyms, leisure centres, fitness centres, sports clubs, exercise classes and personal trainers. So how do you choose a good physical activity provider?

A few general tips

Here are some general points to keep in mind – they apply to any activity you may choose. Consider issues like:

- Free first session – try it before you buy it. Ask if you can have a free lesson, visit or trial to see whether the centre, class or personal trainer is right for you.
- Qualifications – personal trainers, fitness instructors and group fitness instructors should be certified through a registration organisation such as Physical Activity Australia or Fitness Australia.
- Location – exercise has to be convenient. You're more likely to use a fitness centre, class or personal trainer if they is close to either your home or workplace.
- Code of practice – fitness centres should operate in accordance with the code of ethics and business practice developed by industry and government.
- Atmosphere – it's important to be comfortable with the atmosphere of the fitness centre. Consider the age range and gender of the other members, the type of music played and the gear that people wear.
- Membership – find a payment schedule that meets your budget needs. Find out exactly what the membership fee is and what it includes.

Choosing a centre or gym

Fitness centres usually offer access to a range of activities, equipment and assistance. Some may offer other services, such as childcare and extended hours, that may suit your lifestyle. When you are trying to choose a fitness centre, the key points to consider include:

- Activities, equipment and facilities – make sure the club offers activities, equipment or classes you like and that meet your personal fitness goals, for example, personal training, free weights, aerobics classes, Pilates, swimming and so on, and that they are offered at a time of day that fits your schedule.
 - Other services – such as childcare, swimming pool. Is a fitness assessment and personalised exercise program part of your membership or will extra charges apply? Will you have to pay extra for childcare and towels?
 - Opening hours – make sure your club is open when you plan to go.
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- Level of supervision – is the gym floor constantly supervised? Do staff provide new members with an orientation and instruction in using the equipment and facilities?
- Image and reputation – before you join, talk to current members about their experiences with the club.
- Financial and personal security.
- Little details – how clean is the facility? is the music too loud? is most of the equipment in working order?

Choosing a fitness class

From aerobics to yoga to dance, there are classes in just about everything. Ask family and friends if they can recommend a class or look in your local directory.

When you are trying to choose a class, key points to consider include:

- Will you enjoy it? – remember, the only way you will stay with a program of regular aerobic exercise is if you look forward to attending the class.
- Select a good instructor – look for an instructor who is interested in you and makes everyone feel welcome. A good teacher will explain the benefits of each exercise and demonstrate how to do the exercise.
- Class levels – do classes cater for different fitness levels and experience such as beginners, intermediate and advanced?

Choosing a personal trainer

People use personal trainers to help them reach their health and fitness goals. Personal trainers will tailor an exercise program to your personal needs, motivate you to exercise and offer basic advice on nutrition.

Good places to start looking for a personal trainer include local gyms or fitness centres. Ask friends for recommendations or look in the telephone directory under health and fitness centres. When choosing a personal trainer, key points to consider include:

- Personality and communication skills – trust your instincts about the impressions the trainer makes upon you. The trainer should be someone you like.
- When are they available? And where will you train?
- How do they tailor exercise programs for individuals? What activities do they offer? What training methods do they use?
- Can they offer nutrition advice as well?
- Ask for references – so you can ask others about their experience
- Do they, or their employer, have insurance cover?
- What are the standard costs and are there extra fees?

Medical conditions

If you have a chronic or complex medical condition, you will need to consult with your doctor, and possibly a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist before using a personal trainer.

Pre-exercise screening is used to identify people with medical conditions that may put them at a higher risk of a experiencing a health problem during physical activity. It is a filter or 'safety net' to help decide if the potential benefits of exercise outweigh the risks for you. Print a copy of the **pre-exercise screening tool** and discuss it with your doctor or exercise professional.

Where to get help

- Your local fitness centre or gym
- Fitness Australia Tel. 1300 211 311

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