

Gym dandy

Should you go the fitness club route?

By Erik J. Martin

WITH THE NEW year comes a renewed wish to start fresh and make improvements, including the goal to get fit and fit into that bathing suit next summer.

It's a big reason more than 12 percent of health club members join in January, the year's busiest month for enrollments, per the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association, which also reports that more than 62 million Americans used a health club in 2013.

Winning for losing

Daphne Mallory from Twin Falls, Idaho, can vouch for the effectiveness of belonging to a gym. She joined one two years ago and, within seven months, lost 121 pounds and won two area weight-loss competitions.

"I had lacked energy to spend time with my four children and was embarrassed to go out in public," says Mallory, 38. "But I made a commitment to work out and change my diet, and the weight has stayed off."

After researching five clubs, she chose a nearby facility with a flexible monthly renewable membership and early-morning Zumba dance-fitness classes. "The key is to make a fitness dedication whenever you become motivated to lose weight, even if it's long before or after New Year's," Mallory says.

Membership has its privileges

Joining a club gives members access to multiple pieces of equipment, group fitness classes, personal training services and other amenities they can't get elsewhere, says Michele Kerulis, director of the sport and health psychology program at Chicago's Adler School of Professional Psychology.

"A gym provides a community of support for people to help increase motivation and accountability," Kerulis says. "Plus, it may be more cost-efficient to join a health club than to purchase home fitness equipment."

John Platero, founder and CEO of the National Council of Certified Personal Trainers, says there are fewer distractions at a fitness center than at home.

Moreover, "when there are other people around, you push yourself harder," he says.

Fitness facility factors to fathom

Eager to enroll at a health club? Experts recommend selecting one that provides:

- Convenient hours that fit your schedule
- A variety of group fitness classes
- An accessible location with ample safe parking
- Flexible terms—consider pay-as-you-go plans versus contracts that require longer-term commitments
- Valuable amenities, including modern equipment, ball courts, pool, child care and clean bathrooms, showers and lockers
- Staff professionals, including experienced certified personal trainers and fitness instructors, chiropractors, physical therapists, nutritionists and massage therapists
- A free trial offer to test the club before committing to a contract

Jason Stella, vice president of fitness for 24 Hour Fitness, a San Ramon, California-based fitness-center chain, says the club you pick should also provide a process to help you get acclimated to the facility and a fitness assessment before you begin your workouts.

"You should feel comfortable in the environment from the minute you walk in the front door," says Stella, a Costco member. "And a fitness professional should be available to help you understand your health and fitness goals, why they are important to you and how to accomplish them."



In our digital editions

Click here to learn more about how to choose a gym. (See page 14 for details.)

The Costco Connection

Costco and Costco.com offer discounted gym memberships. Costco members who want to bring the workout home will find a wide variety of exercise and fitness machines at Costco and Costco.com.



Exercising your rights

PERSONAL TRAINER John Platero suggests shopping several fitness clubs and asking the following questions.

1. How long has the club been in business, and who is the owner?
2. What are the renewal costs, and what discounts am I eligible for?
3. Are the trainers and instructors employees or independent contractors? With the latter, what happens if this person disappears with my money?
4. How and when will I be trained to properly use the equipment?
5. How often are the facilities and equipment cleaned, maintained and updated?
6. What club rules are enforced?
7. What are the procedures and penalties for canceling membership?

—EJM

Commitment caveats

Prior to enrolling, do ample research to determine what is and isn't included in your gym membership. Some clubs charge one monthly or annual fee that permits members to use all included amenities, while others have separate fees for classes, personal trainers, nutrition consultation, child care and other services.

Before signing, review the fine print carefully on any commitment, particularly regarding costs, restrictions and termination.

"Be sure the contract contains no blank spaces that can be filled in later," says Angie Hicks, founder of Angie's List, which gathers reviews of local businesses. "Also, learn if your membership renews automatically and how a relocation or injury could affect your contract. Ask questions about anything you don't understand." [E]

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