

IDEA

February 1998

HEALTH & FITNESS
Source

Life Beyond Dieting

A New Nondiet Approach

**Herbal Weight Loss
Supplements**

**ADA Conference
Proceedings**

 **IDEA**
The Health & Fitness Source



do you need a personal trainer in order to achieve your fitness goals? If skilled and experienced, a trainer can help you maximize your results in a shorter period of time than would otherwise be possible. A trainer can keep you motivated and help you adhere to an exercise plan. He or she can take the guesswork out of which types of exercises you should do, how many times you should do them and for how long. Most important, a trainer can help you increase your energy and stamina, make your body stronger and more flexible, protect you from injury and increase your self-esteem.

On the other hand, an unskilled, uneducated trainer or one who does not know how to meet your specific needs (is not qualified to work with you if you're pregnant, for example) may not be able to help you.

Six Questions to Ask

Here are some questions to ask when looking for a personal trainer:

WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION DOES THE TRAINER HAVE? Make sure your trainer has some kind of college degree in the fitness field or a certificate or certification from a university certificate program or nationally recognized certifying organization. However, having a piece of paper doesn't necessarily mean a person is a good trainer. Along with being certified or degreed, he or she should have received practical, hands-on training working with clients. Because the exercise industry is changing all the time, trainers need to update their knowledge regularly. Ask if the trainer belongs to a professional fitness association, such as IDEA, and regularly attends workshops or conventions.

You'll also want to look for a trainer who promotes a balanced approach that combines cardiovascular training, strength training and flexibility training, because developing a strong, healthy body requires all three.

WHAT KINDS OF REFERENCES AND BUSINESS DOCUMENTATION DOES THE TRAINER HAVE? Is the trainer running a legitimate business with a business license (assuming he or she is working alone and not as a club employee)? Can the trainer provide proof of professional liability insurance, a copy of his or her college diploma or fitness certification, and references you can call? If the trainer meets these criteria, chances are he or she is running a legitimate business.

If the trainer is working for or through a fitness facility, what criteria did he or she have to meet to work there? How long has the person been a trainer? How long has he or she been working for that particular facility?

DOES THE TRAINER EXHIBIT PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR? Is the trainer prompt and well groomed? Does this person teach and com-

municate well? Has he or she asked you to fill out a medical history form? If not, have you been asked about your lifestyle and eating habits? Were your answers written down somewhere? Did the trainer do a postural assessment? If the answers are no, find another trainer.

DOES THE TRAINER PROVIDE EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE? Do you feel the trainer has a sincere interest in your well-being? What kind of cancellation policy is in place? What happens if the trainer is late or misses your session? Will he or she make up lost time? Ask for this policy in writing.

DOES THE TRAINER'S PERSONALITY ALIGN WITH YOURS? Is the trainer likable and fun to be around? You probably won't want to hire a trainer you don't like, even if he or she is a great educator. Trust your gut feeling. Your trainer should be able to talk to you and motivate you in a way that is meaningful to you. Also, consider if you'd rather work with a trainer of the same or the opposite gender.

Does the trainer look healthy and vital? Remember, you are looking for a healthy role model.

DOES THE TRAINER'S PRICING FIT WITHIN YOUR BUDGET? According to the 1997 "IDEA Personal Training Business Survey," trainers charge anywhere from \$15 per session to \$70 and up. The average "full-fee" session (without frequency discounts) costs approximately \$40. Pricing structures vary widely, depending on geographic region (charges are frequently higher in urban than rural areas), number of years of experience, education level and knowledge of special populations. Many trainers will discount their per-session fees if you pay for multiple sessions in advance. Some trainers will also train two people at a time, charging each person a lower fee per session.

Most trainers are good-hearted and sincerely interested in helping other people. That's why they chose personal training as a career. However, like with other health care professionals, styles and levels of expertise range widely. Don't be afraid to ask questions, shop around and take your time choosing the best trainer for you. ♦

John Platero is the fitness coordinator for LA Fitness, a chain of sports clubs in Southern California, Arizona and Florida. He oversees 150 personal trainers for LA Fitness and is the creator and director of the Future Fit Personal Training School.

This handout is a service of IDEA, the leading international membership organization in the health and fitness industry.



Choosing a Personal Trainer

BY JOHN PLATERO