

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®



A Bargain for Some, Not for Others

On average, hands-on personal trainers charge between \$35 and \$100 per hour, depending on the market. Their cyber counterparts are available at a fraction of the cost, with some charging as little as \$10 per month. Online training is also accessible to anyone with a computer and modem, making it possible for busy travelers or people in remote areas to have access to a personal trainer. This type of training is recommended primarily for intermediate and advanced exercisers or those with very specific goals such as training for a marathon or triathlon.

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How to Choose an Online Personal Trainer

ONCE THOUGHT TO BE THE EXCLUSIVE domain of the rich and famous, personal trainers have become increasingly popular among the general public. Today, personal trainers are riding the dot-com wave, making their services more accessible and affordable than ever.

Despite the obvious benefits of online training, cyber-training is most effective as a supplement to working one-on-one with a qualified trainer. Due to the complexity of many strength-training and conditioning programs, novice exercisers should begin with a hands-on trainer.

Making Your Choice

With new personal training sites springing up all over the Internet, it can be difficult to pick the best one. There is also the added danger of unqualified trainers with questionable credentials doling out potentially hazardous fitness advice. With that in mind, consider the following tips for picking and utilizing a safe and effective online personal trainer.

First and foremost, check the qualifications of the staff that will be training you. Sites should provide background information about their staff. Make sure the personal trainers have a college degree in an exercise-related field and/or are certified by a well-known organization such as the American Council on Exercise (ACE), the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) or the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA). To check if a trainer is certified by ACE, call 800-825-3636. If the site offers nutritional advice, make sure registered dietitians are on staff.

Make sure the site is easy to navigate. If it's too complicated you probably won't stick with it. Some companies will allow you to "tour" the site before signing up.

Look for a sample workout plan. If available, make sure the plans are thorough and detailed (e.g., weight, sets, repetitions, intensity) and not simply a list of exercises. Also determine whether the site provides a method for visually communicating proper exercise technique as text-only instructions can be difficult to follow.

The site should provide an easy means of contacting your trainer for questions or concerns. Most sites provide e-mail contact, but also look for sites that have a toll-free number so you can actually speak to a trainer. Questions should be addressed in a timely manner.

Look for a site that provides bulletin board-type forums and online group support that you can use to communicate with other exercisers with similar goals.

Finally, avoid training sites that "prescribe" nutritional supplement programs. Trainers should not be advising you on nutrition (beyond the food guide pyramid) unless they are registered dietitians.

Using and Evaluating Your Online Personal Trainer

Once you've decided to sign up, make sure the site requires you to complete a detailed health-history questionnaire. This evaluation should address, among other things, your goals, current level of fitness and past and present health concerns. Trainers need this information to customize your program. Online exercisers should be honest when filling out the evaluation forms. In other words, don't lie about your age, weight or experience level as it could reduce the effectiveness of your training program and possibly lead to injury.

Determine whether the workouts are truly customized for you. If you receive a plan immediately, a computer likely created your workout. These plans are fine for some exercisers, but you may wish to find a site that provides you with a more personalized fitness program.

Is your program updated regularly? Does the site have online exercise logs and do you receive e-mail responses or postings that address your progress?

If you are unhappy with the answers to these questions, or with the service of the site you have chosen, don't hesitate to request a refund and seek out another more suitable online personal trainer. To experience the benefits of a personal trainer, virtual or otherwise, you must feel completely comfortable and confident in his or her ability to help you reach your health and fitness goals.

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at <http://www.acefitness.org> and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts.