

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT PERSONAL TRAINER

A personal trainer should hold a current certification accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) to give you the assurance that you are working with a professional who has the knowledge and skills to provide you with a safe and effective workout. An initiative launched in 2003 called for all fitness organizations offering personal trainer certifications to seek accreditation of their certification exams to raise the standard of personal training to better serve and protect consumers.

The NCCA was selected, given their 26 years of experience in accrediting many allied health professions (e.g., dietitians, nurses and occupational therapists). Currently, only 10 of the more than 90 fitness certification agencies have achieved this recognition. All four certifications offered by the American Council on Exercise have earned NCCA-accreditation standards. For a complete list of the NCCA-accredited certification agencies, please visit www.noca.org and click the NCCA link.



Never be afraid to ask to see a copy of the certification to ensure that it is still current. Most certification renewal periods run between two and four years. You can always contact the certification agency to verify a trainer's status. After checking the certification, there are a few other criteria you should consider when selecting a personal trainer.

Ask for References

Ask the trainer for names, phone numbers and even testimonials of other clients he or she has worked with that share traits and goals that are similar to yours. It makes sense to select a trainer who has worked with clients similar to you or perhaps matches your physical traits (e.g., age and body type). This allows the trainer to empathize and understand your unique challenges and needs.

Call previous clients to see if they were satisfied with the workouts, results and experiences they had with the trainer. Inquire whether the trainer was professional, punctual and prepared, and whether each of them felt his or her individual needs were addressed. Ask fellow members of your health club or friends who are currently working with trainers for their recommendations.

Talk to the Trainer

Developing a personal, yet professional, relationship with your trainer is very important.

Trust your instincts about the impressions the trainer makes upon you. The personal trainer you select should motivate you by positive, not negative, reinforcement. Even more important, that trainer should be someone you like. Ask yourself if you think you could get along well with the trainer and whether you think the trainer is genuinely interested in helping you. The personal trainer who best measures up is the one to hire, because that is the professional who will help you achieve the best results.

Working Experience and Area of Specialization

Inquire about the years of experience a trainer has working with clients. More importantly, ask about the trainer's expertise working with individuals with your needs or limitations.

If you have a medical condition or a past injury, a personal trainer should design a session that accounts for this. If you are under a doctor's care, a personal trainer should gain your consent to discuss exercise concerns with your doctor, and should ask the doctor for a medical clearance.

Find Out What the Trainer Charges

Rates vary depending on the session length, the trainer's credentials, experience and expertise, and the geographic location of where he or she works and you live. For example, a personal trainer who works in a fitness club will probably charge less per hour than one who works independently and needs to come to your home or office.

Education

A college degree in the fields of exercise science or nutrition improves the knowledge and credibility that a trainer has in developing your program, though not having a degree certainly does not preclude a fitness professional from being effective.

Liability Insurance and Business Policies

Many personal trainers operate as independent contractors and are not employees of a fitness facility. You should find out if the trainer you want to hire carries professional liability insurance.

A reputable personal trainer should also make sure that you understand the cancellation policy and billing procedure. The best way to avoid confusion and protect your rights is to have those policies in writing.

Compatibility

Some people like to exercise in the morning, some in the evening. Will the personal trainer you're talking to accommodate your schedule? What about the trainer's gender? Some people do better working with a trainer of the same sex; others prefer the opposite sex. You should consider these and any other personal compatibility concerns you may have before beginning a working relationship with a trainer.

Additional Resources

About.com: www.exercise.about.com/cs/forprofessionals/a/choosetrainer.htm

National Commission for Certifying Agencies: www.noca.org/NCCAaccreditation/AccreditedCertificationPrograms/tabid/120/Default.aspx

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 www.acefitness.org and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts™



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