

## 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. If the site offers nutritional advice, make sure registered dietitians are part of their team. Personal trainers should have a college degree in an exercise-related field and/or are certified by a well-respected organization such as the American Council on Exercise (ACE) or another NCCA-accredited fitness certification organization. To check if a trainer is certified by ACE or to locate an ACE-certified trainer in your area, visit [www.acefitness.org/findanacepro](http://www.acefitness.org/findanacepro).
- Inquire about the trainer's experience with your age group or with your particular needs or health challenges (for example, specialization with older adults or weight management). Be wary of sites that rely on "celebrity trainers" or professional athletes to sell their services. It's important to find out who will actually be designing your workouts, and always avoid sites that make exaggerated claims or guarantee fitness results.
- 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 (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 email 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 MyPyramid Food Guidance System and USDA guidelines) 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, present level of fitness and health concerns. Trainers need this information to customize a program to fit your needs. 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. Some sites use computer programs to provide pre-set workout plans based on how you answer the questions on their evaluation forms. 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,

especially if you have any specific health concerns.

- Is your program updated regularly? Does the site have online exercise logs and do you receive email 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.

### 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.

*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/GetFit](http://www.acefitness.org/GetFit) and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts™.*



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