

SENIOR FITNESS

Hiring a Personal Trainer

**By
Jim Evans**

DEAR JIM: I finally took your advice and started an exercise program at my local health club. I'm enjoying some of the group exercise classes like yoga, tai chi, and water aerobics, but I'm hesitant to try the exercise equipment. It looks very intimidating, and I'm afraid I might hurt myself if I try to use it on my own. My membership advisor says I should hire a personal trainer to learn how to use the equipment and design a program for me. I'm 74 and have some medical issues. What do you think? **FIT IN FARGO**

DEAR FIF: Congratulations on making the decision to begin an exercise program! Your health club should be able to provide you with a variety of different programs and facilities to help you reach your goals.

It's probably a good idea to consider hiring a personal trainer if it is in your budget and if the club does not otherwise provide for some kind of introductory program to familiarize you with the equipment – especially if you have medical concerns. A good personal trainer can show you how to use the equipment properly and design an exercise program specific to your needs. Equally important, a trainer can provide you with the one-on-one motivation to help you establish purpose and consistency in your exercise regimen. How to find the right one?

Many reputable sources will tell you to look only for trainers who are “certified,” but the term is misleading since there are more than 300 different so-called “certification” programs with varying degrees of credibility. The multitude of different college degrees can be similarly misleading with such important-sounding designations as exercise physiology, exercise science, sports psychology, leisure and sports studies, sports administration, fitness management, health science, health promotion, strength and conditioning, health and wellness, and more. Confusing, doesn't it? Suffice it to say that most certifications and degrees will provide at least some foundation for personal training – some infinitely more than others. There are also a few excellent and very knowledgeable trainers who have neither a formal education nor certification underscoring the fact that experience also counts for something.

I suggest that you meet with trainers individually to evaluate their “people” skills – their ability to communicate in terms that you can understand, their ability to relate to your age and medical concerns, and their ability to LISTEN. Ask for references and find out which trainers have experience working with older adults. Watch them working with current clients whenever you are at the club too. Are they staring vacantly into space or chitchatting with other members while their client is exercising or are they really focusing on the needs of their client?

Age and gender might also be factors in your decision. How will you feel if the trainer is the same age as your grandchildren? Will you feel comfortable working with a trainer of the opposite sex? These are still more reasons why a personal interview with each of the prospective trainers is important to determine your comfort zone.

Every reputable trainer should at least require you to provide your personal health history to determine if you have any physical or medical concerns – including prescription medications - that would contraindicate certain activities. Some trainers may even want to consult with your physician before commencing with any specific course of exercise.

And, finally - price. Hiring a personal trainer is an investment, and it is not inexpensive. Most trainers charge by the hour. You may be able to purchase multiple sessions for a discounted rate and, if you have friends or relatives of a similar age and with similar goals, some trainers offer additional discounts for group training. But, remember that you are entering a professional relationship where value – not price - is paramount, and value has many dimensions when it comes to hiring the right personal trainer.

Jim Evans is a 38-year veteran of the health and fitness industry and a nationally recognized consultant on fitness for seniors. He is also host of the popular radio talk show “Forever Young” on San Diego’s KCBQ 1170 AM (www.fyradio.biz) which focuses on issues of health, fitness, and quality of life for older adults.