

SENIOR HEALTH & FITNESS

Choosing a Stationary Bike

**By
Jim Evans**

DEAR JIM: I'm 72 years old and considering the purchase of a stationary bike for Christmas to get more exercise, but I don't know where to start. It's very confusing because there are so many different makes and models to choose from, and some of them are quite expensive. What should I look for in a good stationary bike? **PEDAL PUSHER**

DEAR PEDAL PUSHER: Good question. It would seem like buying a simple stationary bike would be easy but, as you have already found out, it can be complicated by so many different selections on the market. It can be further complicated when you start looking at all the bells and whistles such as computerized fitness data, heart rate monitors, multiple resistance levels, exercise programs, and more – all of which can affect the cost.

Let's keep it simple and start with the seat. If the seat is not comfortable, it won't make any difference what kind of bike you purchase. Seats come in a variety of sizes and shapes, so be sure to pick one that literally "fits your bottom." Some of the traditional racing seats might appear to be more stylish, but they can literally become a "pain the rear" for many people – especially if you are a larger person. The seat should also be adjustable so that you can raise it or lower it, and your legs should be slightly bent at the knee (not locked or straight) with your feet firmly planted on the pedals.

Other considerations:

- Pedals – preferably with adjustable with spring-loaded clips on the outer edge of each pedal to hold your feet in place. Oversized pedals are available for large or wide feet.
- Recumbent vs. upright – if you have lower back or balance problems, a recumbent bike (a stationary bike with a seat back and the pedals in front) might be the best choice.
- Assembly – look for something already in one piece or you might find yourself staying up all night trying to put it together on Christmas Eve (with the inevitable missing part).
- Size – be sure you have adequate space (recumbents take more space).

- Warranty – only important if you buy new or used from a dealer.
- Portability – wheels (usually on the front) make it easier to “tip and roll” your bike from one place to another if you have to, but it’s usually better to keep it in one place.
- Weight Specification – be sure your bike is built to accommodate your weight.
- Stability – a wide base is important to prevent tipping when you get on and off.
- Parts & Maintenance – not usually a problem with a major brand, but you should know where to go if something goes wrong.
- Safety – the flywheel, fans, or any moving parts (except the pedals, of course) should be covered.
- Resistance levels – a little variety in resistance is good, but don’t get carried away.
- Programs – the more programs, the bigger the price, but they can keep you from becoming bored too.

Where to buy? The unfortunate reality is that most home stationary bikes usually end up gathering dust in someone’s garage or basement, so a garage sale is usually a good place to start to find a good bargain. The local classified ads can be another good source. Either will provide you with an inexpensive way to test the resolve of your newfound motivation without breaking the bank. If you are still using your bike regularly after six months, it will be worth investing in a better model. Happy pedaling!

Jim Evans is a 40-year veteran of the health and fitness industry and a nationally recognized fitness consultant. He is vice president/general manager of the renowned 7 Flags Fitness & Racquet Club and host of the popular radio talk show “Forever Young” on San Diego’s KCBQ 1170 AM (KCBQ.com or fyradio.com) focusing on issues of health, fitness, and quality of life.