

Choosing A Health Club That's Fit For You

(NAPSA)—Like people, health clubs have individual personalities, so it is important to find one that best suits you. With the variety of fitness facilities available these days, the options can be overwhelming. To ensure that you keep going back to the club, find one that meets your needs and makes you feel comfortable.

When looking at different health clubs, keep these things in mind:

- **Location.** This is ultimately one of the most important considerations, as informal research suggests that five miles is about as far as most people will travel to exercise regularly. Do you prefer to go to the club from home or before or after work? If you travel frequently, will a national chain that gives you workout privileges in their facilities throughout the country better serve your needs?

- **Services.** Figure out what you truly want from a club—be it classes, personal training, spa services, and/or daycare—and look for a place that offers it. Some clubs are like community centers, with social opportunities, educational seminars and even restaurants. Will you take advantage of these things, or are you content with a few exercise bikes and weights?

- **Hours.** Is the club's schedule in sync with yours? Some clubs are open 24 hours; others aren't. To catch a 7 a.m. train, you'll need a



facility that opens before 6:30 a.m.

- **Class schedules.** Do you want to try Pilates or yoga? Then make sure they're offered on days and at times that fit into your schedule. If you roll out of bed at 9 a.m. on weekends, 11 a.m. Saturday classes may be perfect.

- **Equipment.** Free weight fans may not want a club with a lot of machines—preferring dumbbells and barbells instead. If you love the elliptical cross-trainer, but the club only has three—and they are always in use—you're likely to get frustrated. Be sure the club has premium equipment from a leading manufacturer such as Life Fitness, and check out the variety, usage and upkeep; if it doesn't look well maintained, you may encounter out-of-order signs down the road.

Most fitness facilities will provide free workout passes so you can check out the place for yourself. To best assess the atmos-

phere, visit at the times when you would typically go to the club. A fleet of Lifecycle exercise bikes, treadmills and cross-trainers is only impressive if it's in good working order and can accommodate the member traffic.

Pay attention to externals as well. Notice if the locker rooms are clean, the workout areas are tidy and well ventilated, and if you are comfortable with the club's appearance, music, lighting and overall environment.

Also, while you are visiting clubs, talk to the members, as they generally are eager to give you their opinions. Include questions about what is important to you—the staff, fitness instructors, cleanliness, crowds and equipment upkeep.

Once you've identified your ideal health club, determine how flexible your membership needs to be in terms of payment plans, package deals and cancellation policies. Many clubs may offer specials, such as waived initiation fees and reduced prices for employees of certain companies. Check with your employer before joining a club to see if you can take advantage of any of these options.

Taking the time to get to know different health clubs is the surest way to determine which one is right for you. Choosing wisely can result in a fitter, healthier you.