

Selecting Fitness Equipment

What's right for you?

The process of selecting the correct piece of fitness equipment can be a daunting task. So many different types of equipment, so many manufacturers, so many questions.

Many good consumers start their fitness quest by surfing the web and arriving at a site such as this. They look for answers to questions like, "who makes the best treadmill," or, "which is better, treadmills or elliptical trainers?" Unfortunately, many people fail to ask themselves the most fundamental question. "**What are my fitness goals?**"

You must first establish your fitness destination before you can choose the vehicle (or vehicles) that will take you there.

At Play It Again Sports we find that many of our customers share common fitness goals... "I want to loose weight," "I just want to get fit," "I want to look in the mirror and like what I see." Other customers have more specific needs.... "My doctor tells me I need to exercise, but she said my heart beat is not supposed to rise above a certain rate," or "I need to exercise, but at my age I'm very concerned about falling – I'll need help finding a safe option."

Prior to embarking on an exercise regime, check with your doctor and discuss any health concerns or restrictions you may have. When you are certain you are healthy enough to start an exercise program and have established your fitness goals you can then initiate the process of narrowing down your equipment options.

Begin by answering the following questions:

- **Where in your house will the equipment be placed?** Make sure you measure for available square footage *and* headroom. A piece of equipment purchased in a high-ceiling, retail environment can look very different when placed in a basement with low hanging ductwork.
- **Who is the heaviest person that will use the equipment?** All exercise equipment is rated for a maximum user weight. Unlike your driver's license, you will need to be honest with this question as the safety and longevity of the equipment depends upon the answer. (You can, of course, be creative when you claim who that, "heaviest user," might be...)
- **What is your budget?** *Use caution here.* Remember, the objective is to reach your fitness goals. Evaluate all of your options and determine which piece or pieces of equipment will best satisfy your unique needs then consider the price. At Play It Again Sports you may be pleasantly surprised to find that the total cost is well below the budget you had in mind. Conversely, your needs may exceed your planned budget. In this case, it is best to know what the optimal solution will cost. Health and wellbeing are long-term concerns. Fitness equipment tends to be a durable, one-time purchase. It may be worth investigating financing or other options if you have truly found the solution that will help you to attain your fitness goals.

At this point, it is important to recognize that meeting your fitness goals will likely involve the use of more than one type of equipment. For example, if your goal is to lose weight and get toned, your principle piece of equipment might be a



treadmill or elliptical trainer. When used properly, either of these tools will provide a calorie burning, heart-strengthening workout (aerobic training). However, it is difficult to “get toned” unless you add some type of resistance training (strength training) to your workout. Strength or, “Resistance,” training does not necessarily mean buying a Home Gym or a set of cast iron weights. It can involve something as simple and *inexpensive* as the use of resistance bands or tubes in combination with an inflatable exercise ball. Beyond the toning benefits, resistance training combined with proper diet and aerobic workouts can dramatically speed up the process of weight loss when compared to a program that involves diet and aerobic workouts alone.

Conversely, if your goal is to build muscle mass, your most important equipment purchase might be a full cage, Smith gym and a complete Olympic weight set. Dedication to a well structured lifting routine, proper diet and use of the right supplements will definitely lead to an increase in muscle size. However, aerobic training is also crucial to maximum muscle development. In this case an inexpensive stationary bike might be all that is needed to provide the necessary “cardio” benefit to your routine.

Now, with your goals in mind, you can start to “narrow the field” of equipment options.

Lets revisit the weight loss goal noted previously. Along with a proper diet, Aerobic training will be an essential part of meeting your weight loss goals. Treadmills, elliptical trainers and stationary bikes can all provide a great aerobic workout, but which one is *really* the best for weight loss?

The answer is simple – Any of them will do a great job. The one that is right for you is the piece of equipment that *feels* the best and the one that fits the criteria you established when you answered the previously referenced questions.

Some will prefer a treadmill because of the variety of workouts available with this piece of equipment (walk, jog, run – hills, flats, intervals, etc). Others will like the low impact workout that is provided by an Elliptical Trainer. Still others are best suited to a stationary bike because of the seated comfort it provides and it’s ability to reduce weight-bearing exercise strain on ankles, knees and hips.

Here are a few factors to consider:

Treadmills

- Motor Horsepower – A heavy individual who plans to run on a treadmill will need a piece of equipment with a more powerful motor than a lightweight user who plans only to walk or jog during their workouts.
- Deck Size – The size of the running surface or “deck” required by a user will vary depending upon the users routine. Runners will be more comfortable on a wider and longer deck than is required for walking or jogging.
- Number of programs – A larger variety of workout programs will provide for more interesting workouts over time.

(Follow-up Question: Why not just buy the treadmill with the biggest motor, the biggest deck and the most programs? Wouldn’t that be an all-purpose solution? Answer: It might be the correct solution for some users, but that all-purpose solution is also the biggest, heaviest and most expensive solution. Depending upon the available workout space, the available budget and most importantly, the users workout style and goals - a smaller, lighter, less expensive treadmill might be the best solution.)

Elliptical Trainers



- Equipment Feel – With Elliptical Trainers, “*feel*,” is everything. Unlike a treadmill where you simply hop on and do what comes naturally (walk, jog or run, that is), the Elliptical Trainer controls your range of motion through a fixed orbital pattern for both your upper and lower body. Every Elliptical Trainer has a different feel. For any individual, there will *always* be one design that feels better than another. This is a case where blind “on-line” purchasing is a huge mistake. The only way to know which one is the best for you is to, “hop on and give it a try.”

Stationary Bikes

- Equipment Feel and Design – Like Elliptical Trainers, all Stationary Bikes will have a slightly different feel. In addition, Stationary Bikes come in two varieties, upright and recumbent. Depending upon the users comfort preferences and physical limitations (if any), one bike design will be superior to another for any given user. Again, the only way to know is to, “hop on and give it a try.”

Toning / Resistance Training Solutions

- Some form of resistance training is crucial to almost all complete workout routines. You may see yourself as a candidate for using resistance bands but would never consider cast iron weight. Well, don’t knock it until you’ve tried it. Go into one of our stores, slip on a pair of workout gloves, sit down on a weight bench and pick up a pair of dumbbells. You may be surprised how good it feels.

At this point it’s time to get off your computer and get into your local Play It Again Sports store. It is impossible to know which piece of equipment feels is right until you have physically tested the equipment. Every piece you try will feel differently and the “right one” is purely a matter of individual preference.

Hopefully this has given you a starting point from which you can begin to plan a path toward better fitness. The staff at your local Play It Again Sports is well trained and welcomes your queries and concerns. Our objective is not to sell you *a piece of equipment*; it is to assist you in creating a unique fitness solution that will help you attain your fitness goals.

