

# How To Choose the Right Fitness Center

By Donna Smith

You have decided to take the first step in getting fit. You want to find a fitness center to help you lose weight, tone up and generally feel great. There are so many fitness centers to choose from and they all offer different amenities and prices. Taking the time to research what each one has to offer will help to ensure that your final decision is a good one. If you end up not liking your choice, you may not work out at the center even though you are paying for its services.

When examining a fitness center, you should consider how long the center has been in business and what the center's background is. Is the center affiliated with a national chain or is it private? What is its policy regarding refunds if the facility closes during your term of membership?

The cost of membership can be expensive depending on the plan and the center. A lifetime membership can cost \$1,500 and up. If you plan to go on a regular basis, this may be the best route. Serena Delray purchased a lifetime membership to a national fitness chain in 1988 for between \$500 and \$600. "I cannot remember the exact amount I paid," she said. "At first I did not utilize the center as much as I should have. After a year, I moved and driving the hour to the center was not easy after I got off of work. Now, I am glad I purchased the lifetime membership because I have a schedule that allows me to go more often and I utilize the yoga and water aerobics classes on a regular basis. I also talk to the fitness trainers more often. They seem more interested in my getting fit." Delray's membership is not transferable. "I have gotten my money's worth," she concluded. Delray said she took her niece for a fitness evaluation and to spend an afternoon working out. With a promotion that was offered and the payment options they chose, a lifetime membership for her niece was about \$1,500 and transferable.

Some fitness centers offer periodic price promotions or family member discounts. When signing a contract, read the fine print and know what you are signing. Some contracts allow you to opt-out within a certain number of days in case you change your mind.

A website, [www.clubindustry.com](http://www.clubindustry.com), lists the top one hundred fitness clubs and chains across the United States.

To make sure your choice does not end up being a total nightmare, make a list of what you are seeking from a fitness center. A few of the items you should consider are listed below:

- Do you prefer to exercise with persons of your same sex or does a co-ed gym appeal to you?

- Do you want a full-service center with personalized fitness trainers on-site that are available to assist you with your workout every step of the way or do you want a center where you work out independently?
- Are you interested in floor aerobics, water aerobics, kickboxing or yoga? Do you want a center that has these types of classes available?
- Do you want a center that specializes in body building and competing or a center that is more into fitness training and toning? Body-building centers focus more on weight lifting and training than on those who are primarily interested in losing weight and toning up.
- Do you want a center that caters to the athlete? Some clubs are sports-oriented and have racquetball, basketball and tennis courts available.
- Do you want a center that has a pool, sauna, steam room or whirlpool available for your use?
- Is the center within an easy driving distance to your home? The farther away it is, the less likely you'll attend on a regular basis.
- Are there private changing rooms and showers available?
- Are the cost and payment options within your budget?

There are several fitness centers across the country that can help you get into or stay in shape. Whether you choose a nationally known fitness center or an independent one, your results will only be as good as your commitment to using the center.