



By Gregory Florez

Home Equipment

With the recent avalanche of information about exercise equipment—from “infomercials” promising complete body workouts and dramatic results for only \$299 to star-endorsed super machines—it may seem impossible to know what to buy. The good news is you have the resources to help you choose wisely and an equipment market with quality products at competitive prices.

DOES IT WORK—FOR YOU?

Moving past the hype, it always comes down to one question: Will the product help *you* reach your goals while fitting your budget and space requirements? Other critical questions include: What physical activities do you *enjoy*? What specifically are your health and fitness goals? Have you purchased equipment in the past, and if so, why is it not currently meeting your needs?

REACHING YOUR GOALS

Whether you are a grandmother trying to prevent osteoporosis or a 20-year-old training for high levels of fitness, you need three components for a successful program: strength, cardiovascular endurance and flexibility. You can accomplish flexibility without equipment, so your needs are narrowed to two categories.

Let's say your goals are weight management, cardiovascular health and lower-body conditioning. Equipment won't do a thing unless you use it regularly. So choose a machine *you will use*. Maybe you find most cardiovascular exercise boring, but enjoy cycling and like the fact you are able to read or watch television while using a stationary cycle. A bike also offers compactness and portability.

Assuming you want a stationary bike, you are ready to begin your research. There are dozens of bikes that cost from several hundred dollars to a few thousand.

Try different models at stores, friends' homes or a local health club while wearing loose, comfortable clothing. Simulate an actual exercise session. Does the equipment fit your body? Is the motion smooth without undue noise? Does the bike have a reading rack? Is the tension/programming adjustment understandable and easy to read and use? Will electronic feedback keep you interested, or are you sufficiently self-motivated that a manual resistance model will work just as well? These steps and questions can't be emphasized enough. Use this same format if you are purchasing strength equipment.

EXPERT GUIDANCE

The best place to begin your search (after consulting with your personal trainer) is a specialty fitness retail store. This kind of store specializes in high-quality exercise equipment. The staff is generally trained on the technical aspects of the equipment and can guide you to the most appropriate machine for your needs. Ask the dealers these questions:

- Do they offer a 30-day, no-questions-asked return policy?
- Do they back up their products with an in-house service team? Exercise equipment, especially treadmills, may require routine maintenance, which should be provided by factory-authorized technicians.
- Do they provide sufficient instruction to help you get started? Quality dealers will provide some written exercise guidelines, an in-home visit with a personal trainer or other specific help to get you going.
- Is there at least a one-year warranty?

YOUR MONEY'S WORTH

Concentrate on your goals, predisposition and past experience before you consider price. Very often, you get what you pay for. If you buy a cheaply made piece of equipment, you are asking for trouble.

First, it may not be biomechanically correct, safe or stimulating. Second, if you use it three to four times a week, it may not last long.

An intelligent way to look at buying home equipment is to first buy a core piece of quality equipment. If you are on a budget, you can then purchase less expensive, portable equipment to support your goals.

Let's say your main goals are cardiovascular fitness and preventive maintenance, and you decide to buy a quality treadmill. After purchasing your treadmill, you find your budget is drained, and you still have nothing to address strength training. Strength training can be accomplished with inexpensive portable equipment from resistance tubing to cast-iron dumbbells and an adjustable bench.

The key is to buy at least one quality piece of equipment. You can supplement it with less expensive items if your budget is limited. If money is less of an issue, you can buy additional quality equipment one piece at a time.

Investing in quality exercise equipment that meets your goals protects your most important investment: your health. ●

Gregory Florez is president and CEO of First Fitness Inc., which designs exercise programs for individuals, corporations, health clubs, residential dwellings and commercial clients in five major U.S. cities. Gregory is also a member of the IDEA board of advisors.

A service of IDEA, the international association of fitness professionals, the leading organization serving personal trainers, exercise instructors and fitness business operators.

Kimberly A. Searl
www.mindbodybalance.com
By Appointment Only
Phone: 734 - 241 - 7457
Fax: 734 - 241 - 7457
kim@mindbodybalance.com