

Selecting Home Exercise Equipment

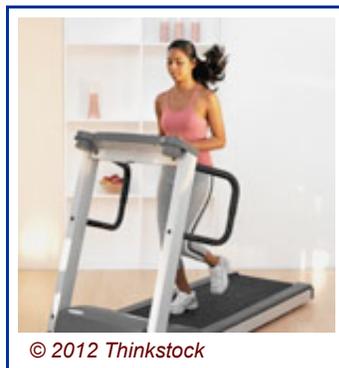
Many people choose to stay in shape within the comfort and convenience of their own homes. According to the National Sporting Goods Association, in 2010 Americans bought nearly \$5.4 billion worth of new exercise equipment

Although more economical than purchasing an ongoing fitness club membership, buying exercise equipment is an investment. It will require time and research to find the right equipment that meets your fitness needs and your budget.

Things to Consider

Because there is such a wide range of exercise equipment available — representing a wide range of quality and price — there are many things to consider before you buy. Some questions to ask yourself include:

- Do you already know how to use the type of equipment you are interested in buying? Have you tried it at a health club, gym, or somewhere else?
- Have you considered alternatives to expensive equipment, such as buying a stand to convert your own street bicycle to a stationary unit or purchasing a set of weights and a bench rather than a weight resistance machine?
- Are you buying equipment based on advertising claims? Make sure to fully evaluate advertising claims for exercise products, particularly those that offer "get fit quick" solutions.
- Do you have enough space for the equipment and have you planned a place for it where you will be inclined to use it? Is the place pleasant, well lit, and well ventilated?
- Do you have your doctor's medical clearance if you have an existing health condition, such as heart disease, low back pain, or arthritis?



One of the most important thing to consider before investing in exercise equipment is whether you are motivated enough to exercise alone at home.

If you already work out at home using exercise videos or small-scale pieces of equipment, then you probably have a good idea of your fitness needs and how to meet them with new equipment. If you are just beginning a fitness program, you may want to investigate different exercise options — classes, health clubs, home exercise videos — before investing in your own equipment.

Try Before You Buy

Many options are available when you are ready to buy home exercise equipment. Take your time, shop around, and think carefully about what equipment best meets your fitness needs. The equipment you buy should be an activity that you not only enjoy, but one that can be adjusted to meet your fitness level as it improves.

Never buy exercise equipment on impulse. Try out any equipment (wearing exercise clothes and athletic shoes) several times before you buy. Make sure you can operate it easily and that you feel comfortable using it.

Types of Equipment

Most cardiovascular equipment offer a variety of features, from increased resistance to heart rate monitoring to programmed workouts individualized to your age and weight. Equipment pricing varies widely depending upon construction and features. Compare equipment that offers the features that are important to you and your fitness goals.

Also, take note of equipment warranties, which can range from a short 90-days to a lifetime warranty.

- **Treadmills.** Walking or jogging on a treadmill can improve your cardiovascular fitness and muscle tone in your legs. Some models add poles to give you moderate upper body conditioning, as well. Most allow you to turn up the speed and increase the incline to intensify your workout. Motor strength ranges from 1.25 horsepower to 4.0 horsepower, but your weight and planned activity (walk, jog, run) affects the motor strength you will require.
- **Elliptical/cross-trainers.** These machines provide a low impact cardiovascular workout. In addition to increasing muscle tone in your legs, some elliptical machines offer upper body conditioning. Most feature changes in resistance and inclination, as well.
- **Stationary cycles.** Many types of stationary cycles are available for a non-impact aerobic workout. Some are upright bikes, others are recumbent, which many people find more comfortable. Most come with a digital timer and some have devices to measure your distance, speed, and calories burned and can simulate road, mountain, or racing conditions. You can adjust the machine's resistance to intensify your workout.
- **Stair climbing machines.** Using stair climbing machines can improve your cardiovascular fitness and leg muscle strength with less stress on your knees than using real stairs. Most come with monitors that display steps per minute and time, as well as let you increase resistance manually for a better workout. Many models also feature pre-set training workouts, such as for interval training or endurance.
- **Cross-country ski simulators.** Cross country ski simulators work both the arms and legs, helping you get the aerobic and muscle-toning benefits of cross-country skiing without leaving the house. The machines have ski-like sliding footpads and rope-and-pulley devices for your arms. Some let you increase the incline for a tougher workout. Monitors record your heart rate.
- **Weight machines (home gyms).** Most home gyms allow you to do a variety of strength-building exercises, including triceps extension, pull down, shoulder press, leg extension, leg curl, chest press, and biceps curl. The machines make it easy to set up and change weights.

Using Your Equipment

Home exercise equipment is a very good way to improve your overall health and fitness, but only when it is used regularly and safely. Keep these tips in mind when using your home exercise equipment:

- **Warm up and stretch.** Always take time to warm up and stretch. Research studies have shown that cold muscles are more prone to injury. Warm up using your cardiovascular equipment at a slow to moderate pace, or by running or walking in place for 3 to 5 minutes. Then slowly and gently stretch, holding each stretch for 30 seconds.
- **Cool down and stretch.** Stretching at the end of a workout is too often neglected because of busy schedules. Stretching can help reduce muscle soreness and keep muscles long and flexible. Be sure to stretch after each workout to reduce your risk for injury.
- **Start slowly.** Build up your exercise routine gradually over time. If at first you try to do too much, you can hurt yourself and lose your motivation to stick with your fitness program.
- **Watch your technique.** Poor exercise mechanics leads to overuse injuries such as shoulder problems in people who use cross-country ski machines or knee problems in those who use stair climbers.
- **Do not ignore pain.** If using the equipment is painful, stop and rest for at least a day. Adjust the machine to make your exercise less strenuous.

Source: *National Sporting Goods Association Sporting Goods Market in 2011 Report*

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