

Be selective, be smart when buying home exercise equipment

By Gerald J. Greenspan

Two important variables must be considered when purchasing exercise equipment: The equipment's biomechanics or body mechanics, and its ergonomics.

Movement biomechanics studies and precisely determines the stresses placed on the body's joints and muscles when performing different physical activities. Ergonomics is the design of an object to correctly fit the human body. Ergonomically designed equipment adapts to the person rather than a person contorting to fit the equipment.

The following are general guidelines for buying exercise equipment:

✓ **Space allocated:** How large an area are you designating for a home gym? Basements, family rooms and spare bedrooms should be considered viable options, while your bedroom normally shouldn't.

✓ **Budget:** To a certain extent you get what you pay for. Quality equipment performs much better, safer and longer than less expensive equipment. Just as your home and car, exercise equipment should be considered a long-term investment. Divide the price of equipment by 10 to estimate the annual cost of owning it.

For example, \$1,500 worth of exercise equipment amortizes out to \$150 a year or \$12.50 a month. Exercise equipment specialty stores offer the highest quality equipment and most offer 6- or 12-months same-as-cash on equipment purchases exceeding a certain dollar amount.

✓ **Convenience:** Machines with selectorized weight stacks are more convenient, but also more expensive. Weight changes in these machines involve changing the position of a pin in a weight stack. If saving time is important, you may want to consider purchasing a selectorized unit. Expect to spend \$1,000 or more for a quality unit. Having your own home gym also saves you from trudging to the gym, and ultimately is less expensive than gym memberships.

✓ **Adjustability:** This feature concerns ergonomics. Are adjustments present to modify the equipment to fit different sized and shaped individuals? For example, can the leg extension pads be moved up and down? You will find such adjustment mechanisms in better designed equipment.

✓ **Goals:** If you are exercising to improve athletic performance, such as cycling, you should train on a stationary bike since your training should mimic the actual athletic activity you're training for as closely as possible. If you are just training to get in better shape, remember that you cannot cause certain areas of your body to lose fat by spot training those specific areas of the body.

And now for things not to do. **Do not:**

✓ Assume that one piece of equip-

ment is capable of training all areas of your body. A machine designed for cardiovascular training will not increase muscle strength to the same extent as progressive-resistance equipment and vice versa. Anything that sounds too good to be true probably is just that.

✓ Believe all the infomercials. Scrutinize the credentials of the individual recommending a product. Being an athlete or celebrity in no way makes one a fitness expert. Furthermore, a doctoral degree in nutrition might qualify someone to comment on the value of nutritional products, but certainly doesn't make them an expert on the body mechanics of an exercise machine.

✓ Be fooled by salespeople or exercise equipment companies throwing around the terms "biomechanics" and "ergonomics." These are watchwords in the exercise industry, and many pieces of equipment boasting these claims actually have poor biomechanics and ergonomics. Likewise, few people are experts in biomechanics and ergonomics. Do your own research or consult with someone who understands exercise and exercise equipment. ■

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