

Picking a Gym

Examining options, close to home and work

By Rebecca Tucker

Unless you have a burning desire to do synchronized swimming after hitting the climbing wall, you should be able to find a gym that suits your needs within a 10-block radius of pretty much anywhere in Manhattan.

"You want to stay within a few blocks of work or home," advised J. Travis, a representative of New York Health & Racquet Club. The farther out of your way you have to go, the better chance you'll decide to skip it.

If you're averse to a set routine or want additional flexibility, look for a club with multiple branches that allows members to use all of its gyms, Travis recommended.

Even if you pass a gym on the way home every day, you want to make sure you know what you're getting before you buy a membership. "Before signing up at a health club, make an appointment to tour the facilities. Visit the club during the hours that you plan to use it, and take the time to decide if you feel comfortable in the facility," recommends www.healthclubs.com. Visit the website to search for a health club by location.

On the tour, women in particular should make sure to take note of "whether it's a meat market or not," advised Scott Whipple, manager and trainer at the Rivergate Fitness Center. If the gym does have a nightclub atmosphere, but you're more interested in the weights than the weightlifters, then a female gym-goer may want to consider joining an all-women's gym.

To make the most of your money, decide what it is you want from a gym. Are you going for half an hour to hit the treadmill? If so, then a small gym that offers the basic machines will do the job, starting at around \$30 a month. Dolphin Fitness Clubs is offering a discounted six-month rate of \$149 for six months.

If you want extras, which range from conventional benefits like a swimming pool or child care but can

include outdoor cycling classes in the summer or a full-blown spa, you can get them all at what Travis calls "lifestyle facilities."

Comparison shopping lifestyle facilities is tougher than one might think, since most high-end health clubs do not list prices on their websites. Bally Total Fitness refuses to give you a ball-park rate until you come in for a consultation to "build your own membership," which Scott Whipple says is common practice.

New York Health & Racquet Club members pay between \$72 and \$119 per month; Crunch costs \$89 per month, and a Reebok Sports Club membership costs \$188.

If you can't self-motivate to drag yourself out of bed when it's still dark out to trudge through slush to the gym

before work, then a personal trainer might be your best bet. Not only does a personal trainer motivate you to get to the gym, but once you're there, he or she will crack the

whip and make you work.

When choosing a trainer, make sure he or she is nationally certified, recommends Joe Massiello, the owner of Focus Integrated Fitness. Look for a certification from the American Council on Exercise (ACE), National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), or American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM). Otherwise, you may be paying for expertise gleaned from a \$50 online course. Ask to see a list of your potential trainer's ongoing education, Massiello recommends, because technology and methodology changes so frequently that a certification becomes outdated within a few years.

Massiello's company caters specifically to those who want to work out without leaving their building. For between \$100 and \$125 an hour, a professional trainer travels to the client.

"We go to them, so there's virtually nowhere else to escape to," said Massiello, only half joking.

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