

Shaping up for Summer : selecting a fitness club

By Patricia Duncan

With winter officially over and summer on the horizon, now is the time to get into shape before we have to peel off those comfortable, forgiving winter layers. Being stronger and fitter can only be an advantage for our total health. Feeling good boosts our confidence and provides a more positive outlook to help us deal with the increasing pressures of life today. Some people are highly motivated to follow an individual fitness plan; the rest of us head to a gym to seek help with our pursuit of better health and improved appearance.

How do you choose a fitness facility?

Today, with so much choice, it is wise to identify **your goals** clearly so you can select a facility that is compatible with your needs. Is your intent weight-loss and toning, building more strength and endurance, improving cardiovascular function, or serious bodybuilding? What you want can help define the facility that will be a good fit for you.

Do tour the gym or complex before you make a commitment and get a sense of **the clientele** as well as the facilities. Different establishments will attract a different crowd. Some may have a more competitive atmosphere than others; some are noisy and busy while others have a quieter ambience. You will find co-ed places and also those that cater to a single gender market.

Convenience is an important factor in your selection. It is easy to be initially enthused about exercise, but it is also easy to find excuses to drop out. Stay motivated by choosing a location that is not out of your way and has hours that suit your lifestyle. Some gyms are open from 5.30am to 11pm on weekdays, with reduced hours on Saturday and Sunday. You may even find a 24-hour facility.

The **programs and amenities** offered will likely narrow your choice. Some people need plenty of variety to maintain interest, but others are happy with a clearly defined routine. Be sure the classes and programs fit both your needs and your schedule. Check on childcare availability and costs, if necessary.

While taking your tour, look over the **equipment** for quality and quantity. Standing in line to use a machine can be frustrating. Look for top-of-the-line, well-maintained equipment. Your safety is an important concern.

Ask questions about **staffing and staff qualifications**. You want more than a person who can simply show you how the equipment works. A properly trained staff can set up your program and monitor your progress while offering encouragement. They must also be able to advise you accurately if you have a medical condition. Most places offer the services of a **personal trainer**, usually at extra cost, but do ask about qualifications and experience here too.

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Visit the locker rooms and hygiene facilities, both for availability and overall **cleanliness**. If you are touring a large complex, look into the availability of spa services, saunas and whirlpools, and racquet courts. Remember, you want the most out of your gym/ club to help you reach your fitness goals.

Cost, naturally, will be part of your decision and Tradebank clients can use T\$ to purchase memberships at a variety of gyms/health clubs across Canada. Your personal exploration of a facility will help you spend your T\$ wisely for your health.

What kind of facilities can you chose?

One of the fastest growing sectors, in a response to busy lifestyles, is the short ,intense work-out. Examples are **Curves**, dedicated to women, with equipment designed for women and **The Blitz** and **Revolutions** for men. These work-outs focus on strength training and sustained cardiovascular activity and range from 20 -30 minutes in duration. The Blitz incorporates boxing and martial arts as well as strength training which will “build muscle, while you burn calories and reduce body fat”. In addition, weight loss and nutritional advice is offered.

Many of these fitness opportunities fall into the medium-sized, full service gym/health club category. You can expect a range of programs and services from **Park Fitness**, **Extreme Fitness**, **Bodywaves**, **The Fitness Firm** and **Fulton’s 24 hour Fitness**. These establishments have strength equipment, including free weights; cardiovascular machines like climbers, bicycles, rowers and treadmills.

Aerobics classes, Pilates, yoga, step, boxercise and spinning are common. Personal trainers are available, but may not be covered by T\$. Some gyms like Fulton’s have special programs tailored to health concerns like osteoporosis. Others have sports affiliations, like Fitness Forum with its squash courts and indoor track.

Several large Athletic/Sports facilities are also Tradebank clients. **Burlington Fitness and Racquet Club**, in business for 30 years, has year- round indoor tennis and squash, classes of all types and full services, including child care. Restaurants and lounges are also part of this club. **Premier Fitness** offers a “complete fitness environment’ catering to “the active and professional lifestyle of its members”. This is a very large complex with separate facilities for women in its **Mademoiselle Ladies’ Fitness Spa**. Within the hotel complex, **White Oaks Resort**, in Niagara, has premier Spa facilities with some unique treatments, as well as the sports centre (tennis, squash, and racquetball), fitness centre and running track.

Choose to be ready for summer fun and look good in the sun. Get to work now on your health and fitness goals by contacting one of these gyms /clubs directly, or call your broker today and find the one that best suits you.