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Using Exercise Equipment in Your Fitness Program

Exercise Bikes are NOT Created Equal – How to Find One Right for You

Riding a bike can be a great way to get low-impact cardiovascular exercise into your workout. However, sometimes the weather is not willing to cooperate. It may be too hot or too cold, or even raining or snowing. Some people find a great way to get their cycling workout is to buy a stationary or “exercise” bike. Here are some things to know before you run out and purchase your own.

Before you even hit the sporting goods stores, you will want to determine that exercise bikes are the equipment for you. If you have a heart condition that limits physical activity, if you have experienced chest pain, if you have problems with loss of balance because of dizziness, if you have a bone or joint problem that could be aggravated by a change in physical therapy, or if you are on heart or blood pressure medication, you should think twice before starting a cycling routine.

Always check with a doctor before starting a new exercise regimen, particularly if you have had recent illness or injury, or are elderly or overweight.

One of the first things you will have to decide while shopping is the style of stationary bike you are interested in. There are two styles – upright, like a normal bicycle, and semi-recumbent, where you are sitting down. Upright bikes ride similar to a regular bike, and usually have a well-padded seat for comfort. If you have back pain, or mobility or balance concerns, a semi-recumbent bike may better suit your needs.

The next thing to consider is the type of resistance mechanism that the bike uses. There are three types: magnetic, air, and flywheels. Flywheels tend to be cheaper, while magnetic ones are more expensive. In the flywheel, a heavy weight strap is tightened around a heavy wheel inside the bike, and a knob is used to control the resistance.

In air resistance bikes a large fan spins as you pedal, creating more resistance as you go faster. Magnetic resistance bikes require an electrical outlet and use magnets to provide resistance.

The control console can vary greatly from bike to bike. For the most effective workout, it is helpful to have a console that displays readouts of speed, distance, and elapsed time so that you can track your progress.

Other, more expensive options can include heart rate and calories burned, or pacers that will help you keep your goals by racing a computer opponent. Keep in mind, however, that the more expensive bike with the special add-ons does not necessarily ensure a better workout. A less expensive bike, used on a regular basis, can be just as effective.

Size of the bike is important as well. Make sure that the seat adjusts to a fit that is comfortable for you height and leg length. In some you can also tilt the seat or adjust the handlebars as well for a better fit. Take the time to make sure that everything is adjusted to a comfortable fit. If you are uncomfortable the entire time you are using your bike, not only is something wrong, but it will discourage you from future workouts.

Always give any potential purchases a test ride before buying. You will want a bike that runs smoothly and quietly at all resistance levels. It should be able to provide adequate resistance for the workout you are looking for and then some so that you can step it up if you choose to. The bike should feel stable, even when you are pedaling hard.

It should be able to be adjusted in such away that it is comfortable for you to use. You should also be able to understand and operate the controls. You might also want to consider whether warranties and local maintenance are available, as well as replacement parts.

If you are unsure whether or not a stationary bike is right for you, consider trying one out at a local gym or recreation center. Many places will also offer classes for stationary bikes, called “spinning”. In the classes, the instructor creates a varied workout of different speeds and intensity, combined with music. This can add some fun to your workout, and help you stay motivated.

Once you find the bike that is perfect for you, you can enjoy all the health benefits of riding – regardless of how the weather outdoors is.

Bicycling Basics for an Overall Workout

Everyone has his or her own favorite kind of workout. For some it is running along a track that will make them feel the most alive, while for others it is swimming laps at the local pool. Still others will enjoy sweating at the gym during a cardio kickboxing class or some high impact aerobics. Yet for many nothing spells exercise like bicycling.

Of course, there is more to an overall workout than simply jumping on a bike and pedaling away. As a matter of fact, there are a number of bicycling basics that will ensure that you will enjoy the best possible overall workout.

First and foremost, make sure you get the right bike that will suit your needs. If you are living near the woods or mountains, and if you foresee that you will be doing a lot of your cycling up and down rough terrain, you may wish to invest in a good mountain bike. On the other hand, if you are living in the inner city and there is no wood or mountain in sight or within a 2-hour drive, then you may wish to consider purchasing a steady road bike.

These bikes are specifically designed for street use and will make your rides enjoyable. As a third alternative, if you foresee to do a bit off- on as well as on-road cycling, your best bet may be a hybrid bike that gives you the best of both worlds. Whether you are on solid pavement or rocky trails, it is important that you have the right equipment to maximize your riding

enjoyment and also to maximize your cycling safety. Skimping on the equipment may result in injuries or broken equipment that is costly to replace.

Speaking of purchasing the right equipment for the job, forego the temptation to buy your neighbor's bike that has been sitting in his garage for the last ten years, or the flea market special that appears to be too good to pass up. If you are truly serious about getting the most out of your overall workout via cycling, you will want to go and speak to the employees at a bicycle shop.

Not only will they be able to accurately assess your needs, but they will also be able to measure you to fit you with the perfect bike. A good fit ensures that your muscles will be properly exercised while the risk of injuries is kept at a minimum. On the other hand, a bike that is too large or too small for you will not permit you to get that workout you crave.

To further ensure a successful workout, another basic will need to be taken into account: safety. You will need a good-fitting helmet while riding. If you are foreseeing a lot of riding, some gloves will also keep your hands comfortable. Do you have shoes that fit properly on the pedals? What about a comfortable shirt and shorts? The right gear will give you extra comfort but also extra safety.

Shoes that slide off the pedals are dangerous, to say the least. Additionally, know how to use your new bike. Give it a try run in an empty parking lot. Learn how it handles around corners, around bends, how long its break path is, and how quickly it shifts gears. Become acquainted with the bike's idiosyncrasies and learn to make them work for you. Once you have practiced riding the bike and feel comfortable with your helmet and any other equipment your purchases, it is time to hit the road or trail!

Of course, the cardinal rule of any workout is the proper warm-up, and cycling is no exception. Prior to setting off on that that first cycling adventure, and any subsequent trips, be sure to stretch and generally warm up your muscles. Once you are warmed up, go ahead and ride. Of course, when you are just starting out, you will want to do so by choosing some leisurely terrain rather than the roughest trail you can find.

Remember, doing too much too soon will only frustrate you and cause that new, and expensive, piece of equipment to gather dust in your garage. Instead, find something that is at or slightly below your skill level and before developing the strength and endurance that cycling offers develop your sense of sticking to it first!

As you can see, cycling is a wonderful sport that has much to offer for anyone, as long as you observe the little cycling basics that will ensure an enjoyable workout.

The Benefits of an Elliptical Trainer

When choosing the equipment for your home gym, you have a variety of options. One popular piece of equipment is an elliptical trainer. It has many benefits that make it quite an addition for your home gym. Here are some of the examples.

The number one reason that elliptical trainers can be a great addition to your workout is the fact that they have no impact. This makes them easier on the joints than walking outdoors or even using a treadmill. Those with joint pain or stiffness can use it easier than some other equipment. It can be very beneficial for those who have back, knee, hip, or joint problems get in a good workout. Getting moving helps stimulate muscles, blood flow, and even bone regeneration to help keep users feeling healthier and stronger.

Another benefit of elliptical trainers is that despite the fact that they are no impact, they do offer resistance exercise. Resistance exercise has been proven to not only help your muscles, but also to help build the bone density necessary to prevent osteoporosis. Resistance exercise also helps to burn calories longer and more efficiently, speeding up weight loss if that is one of your goals. It increases blood flow around the body, causing everything to work more efficiently. Increased blood flow equals increased oxygenation, which helps with cell growth.

Elliptical trainers also use both the upper and lower body. This can cut your workout time in half, as you are essentially getting two workouts done for the price of one. Working both areas of the body at once can also make it seem like you are doing less work, while you are actually doing more and burning more calories. Studies on elliptical trainers suggest that users burn approximately the same amount of calories during the same amount of time as joggers running an eleven-minute mile.

Since elliptical trainers are a combination of both a treadmill and a stair climber, you can get the benefits of both while still varying your workout. You can easily switch back and forth between the three, and you may be surprised that after a few weeks of using an elliptical you can tackle tougher challenges on the other machines. Not to mention that if variety is what you crave in your workout, you can also do exercises backwards on your elliptical. Some models even have the capability to download workouts from the Internet, giving you more options for staying fit.

If you are short on gym space or on a budget, and elliptical trainer may be the answer for you. Elliptical trainers tend to be smaller than treadmills and easier to move and store. This can be great if you have a small gym without much floor space. If you are limited on the amount of workout equipment that you can purchase either due to budget or space concerns, and elliptical trainer can be a good option since it does the exercising of two separate machines.

Once you have decided that an elliptical trainer is right for you, there are some things you should look for. Stride length is important, and should be 21 inches. This is comfortable for most people. An adjustable incline will help you to get the best workout. The motion should be smooth and easy and quiet.

You will also want adjustable resistance for the best workout. Safety feature options include, warm-up and cool-down adjustments, handrails for balance, easy to operate console, and a heart rate monitor. If you plan on keeping your elliptical trainer around a while, you will also want to look into getting one that has a good warranty.

Shop around and test out several models before making your final purchase. If you are still unsure as whether it is the right purchase for you, try using one at a gym or workout center to see how you like it for the entire workout.

Always check with a doctor before changing anything in your workout, especially if you have recent illness or injury or are new to working out. Once you have found the elliptical trainer that is right for you, you are well on your way to a fun a varied workout with many health benefits.

What's a Recumbent Exercise Bike and How It Can Benefit You

The recumbent exercise bike capitalizes on the widespread popularity the recumbent bicycle enjoyed in the early 1930's. As opposed to the standard stationary bike which will have the rider sit straight up, the recumbent bike will allow the rider to sit reclined, almost in a supine position.

There are many health benefits to the supine position; foremost among these is the reduction of strain on the lower back, which permits for longer usage of the exercise equipment. Another benefit is the position of the legs. Since they are on a level closer to the heart than they would be if the rider were sitting on a straight bike, the blood flow to and from the heart is aided, and you will actually be able to experience a higher endurance and therefore a longer time of exercise before you tire.

There are a number of different models available for purchase, and since the price tags can vary significantly, it is up to you to decide which bells and whistles you wish to invest in. Here are some of the better-known models:

First and fore most is the Stex 8020R exercise bike that carries a fairly hefty price tag. The buyer will be rewarded with electronics support that not only monitors and tracks the heart rate, but also calculates body fat! The bike operates quietly and is not dependant on an external power source, which makes it a wonderful addition for the patio or balcony. With 25 different levels of resistance as well as 13 pre-programmed exercise routines, you will be able to enjoy a very varied workout indeed.

For about a thousand dollars less, you will be able to purchase the Star Trac 4410HR exercise bike which may only offer four different pre-programmed exercise programs, but still a hefty 15 levels of resistance.

If the four-figure price tag is too steep for your exercise budget, you may wish to consider the Schwinn 213 exercise bike. It offers less levels of resistance than the Stex- it only offers 16 levels- but at 11 workout programs it only offers two less pre-programmed exercise routines. Displays will offer you the customary exercise bike stats, such as pulse, speed, calories and resistance.

For those who are new to recumbent bike exercise equipment, or who do not know if they will actually stick with the exercise regimen they are embarking upon, the Phoenix Magnetic exercise bike may be the most cost effective option. While it only offers eight resistance levels and no pre-programmed routine, this no-frills machine will help you to gain all the benefits of the workout without blowing your budget if you decide that recumbent bike exercise is not your cup of tea.

As you can see, recumbent exercise bikes come in many different styles and with many different bells and whistles. For those who are certain that this is an exercise program they will enjoy for many years to come, the more expensive models offer a large variety of routines and resistance features that will ensure that the workout never gets boring.

For those, however, who are not so certain about their ability to actually stick with an exercise routine, the bikes in the lower price ranges are a great first step at getting acquainted with this marvelous exercise machine. You may find that it is worth the money to upgrade; or you may thank your lucky stars that you did not spend more money on another contraption that will serve as a clothes rack in your bedroom.

Whatever your exercise goals may be, the benefits of recumbent bike exercise cannot be denied:

- You will strengthen your leg muscles.
- You will build up your endurance.
- You will burn body fat while developing muscle mass.
- You will not tire as easily as you would with an upright exercise bike since the blood is flowing easier from the heart to your extremities and back, which is due to the position of the legs with respect to the heart.
- You will experience less low back pain since the seat supports this portion of your body.

So why not go ahead and give it a try? Your body will thank you for it!

Exercise Balls – A Great Tool for Your Home Gym Workout

If you want to get into shape, and need a good way to do it, then try an exercise ball. Exercise balls are very popular in the gym you might go to, but they are great for an at home workout too. Contrary to popular belief, exercise balls are not a new concept. The ball was developed for kids that had balance problems from muscular dystrophy back in the 1960s. Learn about some of the advantages in using a ball at home, and why it's so good for your body.

Before you say that an exercise ball won't fit into your house, and will be ugly setting somewhere in your home, you need to know that's not true. The balls can be deflated at any time, or just roll them in a closet or under your bed. The exercise equipment can be ordered from a health and fitness store, or even on the Internet, but it doesn't mean that they are ugly. Different textures and colors are always an option with the ball.

Besides, if you're not using it, why not let the kiddos take a crack at exercising with them. It's a lot of fun, and they won't even realize their using muscles that they don't normally exercise. You can always join them in a fun game or to with the exercise balls too.

Using an exercise ball at home eliminates a lot of work and money going to a costly gym every month. You won't have to deal with the headaches and hassles of parking, or your gym membership getting canceled. Buying an exercise ball helps you remain flexible in when you need or want to exercise too. When you buy a quality one, you can use it until it wears out, or you might just want a different color or texture.

It's a short-term investment that will give long-term health benefits, and it'll save a little money in the short term also. Don't let your exercise routine become sidelined because of these petty thoughts. It's your health remember.

There are a lot of good reasons to exercise with a ball. Using one will help your body get strong in the mid section of your body, or the core area. Your stomach, sides, and deep muscle groups in your mid and lower back, are exercised to the maximum. Not only do you benefit from core strengthening exercise, but because the ball has a roll to it, you'll use smaller muscles to keep your balance.

It targets larger muscles, but the smaller ones are exercised too. Because the ball is soft you won't have to worry about hard impact workouts that can damage joints, muscles or ligaments. However, before you begin a strenuous workout consult with your doctor, especially if you've got any pre existing conditions that could be aggravated.

Don't think that this is all you can do with using an exercise ball at home. If you want to expand your exercise routine, then think about investing in some bar bells, or learning some simple or even difficult yoga exercises. You can add them with exercising on the ball, and it will develop other muscles groups. Sit on the ball and do some arm curls, while balancing on the ball with keep all of your muscles healthy.

Yoga positions are held less painful because you're not grinding your back on a floor, but yet at the same time resistance is added, so even the simplest exercises are harder. The choice is how you want to exercise on the ball.

An exercise ball is good for people that have back problems, especially if you're going through any type of rehabilitative therapy. So if you are, you'll notice that pain will be reduced because your spine will be re adjusted from the minute movements that you'll have to make to stay balanced on the ball. If you're having your spine adjusted by a professional, there will be less pain when you go in for treatments. Your spine will be stronger, and you'll have more flexibility because you use the exercise ball before treatment.

Using an exercise ball just makes sense. They are comfortable, and provide large and small muscles use that you might not get with other forms of fitness equipment. Take the time and learn what health benefits you can get, and while you're at it, bounce around with the kiddos in your neighborhood and have a lot of fun.

Proper Exercise Methods for Utilizing a Medicine Ball

If you are looking to add some fun and variety to your workout, medicine balls may be the trick. Smaller than exercise balls, they range from two to twelve pounds and help promote muscle strength and endurance. However, just like any other piece of exercise equipment, it is essential to use it properly for the best workout and to avoid injury.

When you are planning and performing a medicine ball session, there are some things to keep in mind. First, just as with any exercise program, you should always make sure to have a thorough warm up. Practice the exercises without the balls to ensure proper technique. If you are planning to use an exercise ball in addition to another workout, always do the medicine ball exercises first while you are still fresh.

Start with the easier workouts and gradually build intensity. If you are using a medicine ball to support sports training, choose exercises that mimic the movements of the sport. When you have finished your exercises, always have a proper cool down. As with any exercise, never start a new routine without first consulting with your doctor.

Many people use medicine balls to improve their core strength. The core is the center of your body, and where movement and stability begin. Core exercises work the abdominals, lower back, hips, and spine. Medicine balls are perfect for training this area as they can mimic the movements made in everyday activities.

When doing core exercises, it is important to work out both your dominant and your non-dominant sides. You will often find it noticeably easier to do the activities with one side or the other. Working out both sides will balance out your body's strength. Do these exercises as fast as you can while still maintaining proper technique and posture. Keep your back straight and use proper lifting techniques. These sorts of exercises can help with everyday activities like carrying a bag of groceries or an infant around as well as your performance in sports.

Another popular way to utilize medicine balls is to strengthen your upper reaches. These movements are similar to what it takes to lift objects to a shelf above your head. The exercise focuses on the upper body and shoulders. When performing the exercises, try to keep your arms above your head. To increase your range of motion, bring the ball back behind your head a little. You should be able to catch and throw the ball comfortably from this position. Make sure that you are fully extending your arms and not reaching to far behind your head to avoid injuries.

Medicine balls are also effective when training for rehabilitation of an injury. Always check with your doctor before using them for this purpose to prevent further injury. Use the lightest weight that you have, and gradually work back up to what you were at prior to injury. This will improve joint integrity and muscle strength. If you feel pain, stop the exercise and consider something else.

You can also use medicine balls for a fun cardio activity. Set up a variety of exercises, running through them as quickly as is safely possible, with minimum rest. This will help get your heart rate up and burn calories. Despite moving quickly, always ensure that you are using proper technique to prevent injury. If you become breathless, become dizzy, or experience pain, take

a break and seek medical help. Listen to your body, and when you become tired it is time to stop.

No matter how you decide to use your medicine balls, there are some things that should be considered. Always complete throws with full extensions of the arms. Feet should be firmly planted before throwing the ball during standing exercises. Focus on quality of the movements, not quantity or distance and always be careful to use proper technique. Keep your eyes on the ball, and do not attempt to catch balls that are thrown wildly.

Always consult with a medical professional before starting a new workout. Once you feel confident in your proper use of the medicine ball, you can adapt it to your workout to add some fun and variety. It may be just the thing your workout needs to help get you over the hump and help you achieve your exercise goals.

The Power of Pilates – What It Does for Your Body

People are getting into shape all over the country. It is a good idea to get physically fit because you'll live longer, and your quality of life will improve. You'll be able to enjoy so much with family, friends, and life will be so pleasurable. If you've ever heard of yoga or an exercise machine, then you'll know a little about Pilates. You might not have heard about Pilates though, so if you haven't read on to learn more about exercising with them. Learn how it can benefit you physically, and how flexible this mode of exercise is for your routine of exercise.

It might surprise you to find out that Pilates is an exercise that's been around for a very long time, ever since the 1900s. This form of exercise was developed by a man named Pilates, and was first practiced in the city of New York, New York. You can use the physical practices of Pilates for exercising at home or at the gym.

In fact Pilates exercising is popular all around the world. The exercises teach you how to control your breathing, developing abdominal power, aligning your spinal area and pelvis, and by using these in training you'll get greater muscle flexibility. Your joints benefit too because they are strengthened and tightened. Using your trunk area to gain power is the goal with Pilates.

The key to gaining strength and flexibility when using a Pilate's program is to use it faithfully. You can't just pull it out occasionally, but a 30-minute per day exercise of it, will get you in shape in no time. Because it focuses on correct breathing methods, your arteries and lungs will thank you. Your heart function is improved too because Pilates oxygenates your blood in a much better way than traditional exercises.

As with professional athletes, when they breathe correctly, they perform better. You must train like they do, focusing on the correct breathing methods, so you can get the most out of your Pilates exercising. In effect, when you get your abs and muscles of the mid trunk and lower back strong, your coordination will increase. Exercise will be easier then.

Pilates exercising is great because it's easy on the joints and muscles. All you have to have is a very comfortable mat, which is well supported for your body. You can find these at any health

and fitness exercise store. Also, certain discount stores carry exercise mats that you can purchase. Whatever type of mat you get make sure you can work with it on a continual basis. Remember, before beginning any exercise routine, check with your doctor to be sure that it's a safe one for you to do.

Never be too cautious with your health, it's the only body you've got. You can use Pilates with or without exercise props, or equipment. Some types of Pilates exercise does include rings, barrels, or other props that will extend your exercise training, and make it a lot more fun with the exercises you're doing.

You can use Pilates in a rehabilitative manner because there are no rough movements that produce jarring on your joints and muscles. A lot people, with permission from their doctor, will use an exercise routine with Pilates right before they go for their appointment at a chiropractic or osteopathic adjustment. It makes their rehabilitation session go smoother and with a lot less pain.

Not only can you use to strengthen your body, but your mind will be rejuvenated too. Fluid movement helps with lessening tension, and in turn you'll be able to concentrate on your deep breathing exercises, and at the same time can stretch and gain a lot of flexibility with your muscles and joints. Deep breathing works wonders for getting the stress and tensions out of your body with Pilates.

Remember, don't push yourself with learning Pilates, and just go with your body's natural flow. You can move up to more advanced levels of training, but it's not totally necessary. If you join a class to lean Pilates, stick with the level you can do, and you'll be on your way to less stress and pain in your life.

How Yoga Can Benefit Your Exercise Program

Yoga is considered a form of exercise for many people. If you have another sport in which you participate regularly in, like running, or even weight lifting, yoga can benefit you too. It just doesn't matter what type of sport you love, you should still incorporate it into your exercise routine because it can give you a lot of benefits for your primary sports activity. Learn about how this ancient art of expression and sports can help you perform better.

A lot of professional athletes use yoga to help them perform better in their sport. Semi professionals and weekend sports enthusiasts are realizing the usefulness of it too. Yoga provides mental stimulation that you might not get when you do the same sport over and over again.

It relieves the tenuous boredom and allows you to exercise in a new way. By learning a new way to exercise, it'll point you to refocus on the positive aspects of your training, and will help stop injuries in your training or sports participation.

Another reason yoga is good for you to do as a supplemental exercise is because it's versatile. Some styles of it are a very intensive workout, while others are gentler, and use a lot of simple

stretches with fluid movement. With the harder workouts you can truly get an intense aerobic exercise that could even replace your first love exercise. The types of yoga styles will target different muscle groups that you might not be using, and this would help your overall performance too. Balance is a key factor in any successful sport, and it will help you with any faulty balance issues you may have.

Stiff, sore muscles are another key ingredient in training. Flexibility is important because if you're sore you won't practice the sport you enjoy. By stretching in a fast paced or slower style of yoga, you can get a better range in movement, and you'll aching muscles will feel much better. The problem is that most people don't use it on a daily routine, and any gain they've made is lost as far as flexibility and their range of motion. Again, it doesn't matter what sport you're in, the use of yoga will help you in this area.

Core strength is a type of strength that's used in the slow position holding routines in the practice. It will use too contracting muscles and releasing muscles in a certain way that'll will develop your mid section stomach and back muscles of your body. In reality this is the best type of exercise to develop this type of strength.

Compared to an exercise machine it's the better type because muscles are re oxygenated in a slow repetitive motion, and for longer periods of time. Better yet, you'll find that you can work up to adding more training resistance with yoga too.

All sports have the component of correct breathing styles. It's useful to stay competitive and complete it with success. Stress is a factor in sports, and you'll learn how to stay relaxed and focused on the goal that you've got to do to win. Yoga is best applied in learning how to breathe properly when you do it everyday. Remember, it's just a skill that must be practiced everyday to get the greatest benefit from for your sport.

Know that yoga helps other types of health problems that you might be having at this point. If you want help with back pain, fibro, or sinusitis it can aid in some of these chronic or acute conditions. Some people have reported relief from sleepless nights too. Serious problems like heart, respiratory, and blood pressure are helped because of increased blood circulation.

A benefit by using yoga is that mental stimulation and an increased emotional stability is improved. Endorphins are released within the brain that helps with depression and anxiety. This is a wonderful side benefit by using it because if you are lethargic and depressed enough, you won't exercise at all.

Finally, before you start any exercise routine make sure to check with your doctor for final approval. The goal of yoga is to get you moving and to improve your physical ability in a sport you love. You don't want to cause an existing illness or injury to get worse, but you want to improve your performance, and lead a more active lifestyle than ever before.

The Bowflex Bandwagon – Worth the Hype?

At first glance, the Bowflex doesn't look exactly like a weight-training machine. The usual weights have been replaced with flimsy-looking plastic rods. How could anyone get stronger just by tugging on those cords and bending some rods?

And yet, people who own a Bowflex are often enthusiastic about it, trainers and reviewers give sincere, if occasionally reluctant, approval, and the Bowflex brand name has gone from a single machine sold through infomercials to over half a dozen different models available, branching out from its original Bowflex machines to treadmills, TreadClimbers, adjustable dumbbells, wheelchair-friendly home gyms, and dietary supplements, and has introduced its latest innovation in home gyms, the Bowflex Revolution. It is one of the most popular brand names in exercise equipment. But is the Bowflex really everything it's hyped up to be?

Bowflex's main theme and selling point is flexibility. Instead of lifting weights to build muscles, you pull on a pair of cords to flex the Power Rods attached to the ends. Just by changing the position of the seat and the angle and direction from which you pull on the Power Rods, you can do a series of exercises that work out your entire body. This versatility is the Bowflex's trademark. People who choose Bowflex also like its relatively small size and its ability to fold for easier storage.

One of the things that customers don't like as much about the Bowflex is the number of parts made out of plastic. These parts tend to wear out more quickly and give the equipment a general feel of low quality. A few years ago, one of their older models had a recall on some parts that were breaking, but the company was pretty responsible about sending owners of the model a replacement part, even if it sometimes took a while to reach them.

Most units bought directly from the company come with a limited warranty lasting anywhere from five to twelve years, depending on the model, and the patented Power Rods have a lifetime guarantee. However, many customers find dealing with Bowflex's customer service representatives to be a frustrating experience. They are far from the only company to have this reputation, but it is still not very reassuring.

Other than durability, which has improved over the years, customers sometimes find it awkward to get into some of the positions for the various exercises, and more serious trainers and bodybuilders dislike the fact that you can only have a maximum of 410 pounds worth of resistance on any machine.

Of course, the most important question when considering whether the Bowflex is worth the hype is whether or not it actually works. Does it really help you lose weight and build muscle the way the ads claim?

As a matter of fact, it does. The "30 minutes a day, three times a week" claim may be a slight exaggeration, but when used properly and regularly, the Bowflex really does give your entire body a good workout.

What about Bowflex's other equipment? Their treadmills have been reviewed as moderately decent for an average workout, although, once again, they are not quite sturdy enough to last

long under hard running conditions. They also have relatively small motors, tend to be loud, and are generally viewed as being more expensive than they're worth. Bowflex's TreadClimbers are basically a combination of a stair climber and a treadmill, which also gives it the feel of an elliptical trainer.

It's a nice idea, but you should keep in mind that the complexity of the machinery could mean more maintenance. The Bowflex Revolution, the latest addition to the family, employs SpiraFlex technology, the same technology used by astronauts to help keep their muscles strong in space. It has received many favorable reviews, but requires a floor space of over 9 feet by 5 feet.

Another important factor to consider is price. The least expensive model costs about \$900, and many models run well over \$2000. Many of the reviewers who consider the Bowflex to be a decent workout machine still don't think it's worth the hefty price tag. It is possible to find better deals from third parties, but you should be careful, as the warranties promised by Bowflex often don't apply in these cases.

So, the Bowflex may not be everything it's hyped up to be, but it is certainly a decent exercise machine for the average person willing to pay extra.

Exercise Accessories – A Guide to Gloves, Mats, Belts and More

If you have ever stepped into a sports equipment store, you may be overwhelmed with the sheer volume of equipment that they have. You can find several different types of cardio equipment, weights in all shapes and styles, and of course all the items you need for every sport under the sun.

If you are planning a new workout routine, you probably already know what you want in the way of big equipment. Maybe you are planning on getting a stair climber or a home gym or a boxful of aerobic tapes. Whatever you decide to do, you do not want to overlook some of the small stuff.

If you are planning strength training into your routine, one of the most important things you can add is a good pair of gloves. Gloves can keep your hands from slipping as well as help prevent unsightly calluses. To choose the right size glove, measure the circumference of your hand around the first set of knuckles (at the top of the palm), not including your thumb.

Weight training gloves should fit snugly, as they are designed to break in and stretch with use. If you prefer a looser glove you might consider going one size larger than what you need. There are several styles to choose from. Some have longer finger lengths, others have wrist support to prevent injury, and many are washable. Look for a material that allows your hands to breath and wicks perspiration away from your skin.

A must have for nearly every workout routine is an exercise mat. Mats help cushion underneath, provide a stable workout service, and help absorb impact to make exercises easier on your joints. Depending on your room size and work out style, there is a variety to choose

from. Some mats can be permanently installed on the floor if you have a home gym area. Other mats fold up to a smaller size for easy storage. Yoga mats are lighter weight and roll so that they travel easier. Choose a mat that is large enough for you to do your entire workout routine on comfortably.

If you are serious about weight lifting and plan to lift weights extensively, or if you are new to weight lifting but are prone to back injuries, you will want to consider a weight-lifting belt. These belts offer lumbar support to help prevent a back injury when lifting. Belts are measured by your waist size and come in a variety of support strengths. Some even offer a wider front area to prevent abdominal hernias. Always make sure that your belt fits snugly and comfortably and is buckled securely.

Wrist and ankle weights are a good way to punch up your cardio routine. Ranging in size from two to 10 pounds each they help provide resistance to your upper and lower body respectively. This can help you get over weight loss plateaus and get you to your leaner, toned body more quickly. The weights are designed to strap onto your ankles or wrists, some varieties can be used in either place, and buckle securely, usually with Velcro. Start with a lighter weight and work your way up to prevent injury.

Another good addition to your workout equipment is a heart monitor. This way you can monitor your heart rate to ensure that you are reaching your target. Getting your heart rate up to the appropriate level helps ensure the most efficient workout and highest calorie burn. Some of the larger exercise equipment pieces include a heart rate monitor, but these are no help if you prefer to do cardio or do part of your workout outside.

Portable monitors fit like a watch, and depending on the style you select come with a variety of functions. Some will let you know when you have reached your target heart rate, and others will keep a memory of your different laps. Most also have the added bonus of having traditional watch features like a stopwatch and the ability to use it to tell time.

This is just a basic list of some of the more popular exercise accessories. Talk to your doctor or fitness professional about any additional equipment that you might need. Remember to never start a new fitness routine without talking to your doctor first.

Safety Issues to Address When Starting an Exercise Program

We all know that exercise is good for us. It keeps our muscles strong, and our bodies fit and trim. But exercise can be dangerous if the proper precautions are not taken.

Before starting any new activities, you should visit your doctor for a physical. Depending on your age and general health, your doctor may have some advice for exercises that should and should not be doing. Special considerations should be taken if you are pregnant, have recently had an injury or surgery, are severely overweight, or if you have any other medical problems. Your doctor may have you avoid certain exercises or activities depending on your current health.

Next, you will want to check any of the equipment that you are going to be using. All sports equipment, from tennis rackets to home gyms, should be in good condition. Machines with moving parts should move smoothly and quietly. Avoid equipment in disrepair.

You also need to make sure that you are ready to begin exercising. Do you have all of your safety equipment? Some sports or activities may require helmets, eye protection, mouth guards, wrist, knee and/or elbow guards, and protective cup for men, pads, or special shoes. All equipment should fit properly and be in good repair. Many sports injuries are caused because the person was missing the protective gear, or the protective gear was an improper fit.

Take into consideration the time of day and the weather outside. While you should always make sure to drink plenty of fluids while working out, during hot weather hot weather this is particularly important. Your best bet for that is water, and alcohol, tea, and coffee should be avoided at all costs.

Make sure that you are protected from the sun with clothing and sunscreen. Reapply sunscreen often, and consider using a waterproof or sweat proof formulation. Keep in mind that you may need to reduce the intensity of your workout to avoid injury and fatigue. Always listen to what your body is saying.

Protecting yourself during cold weather is very similar. Wear appropriate clothing. Layers work best, as they will trap more body heat and can be added or taken off as needed. Spend some extra time with your stretches. Remember to drink plenty of fluids. Do not forget sunscreen on any areas of exposed skin, it is still possible to get sunburned.

You may decide that exercise after dark or in the wee hours of the morning works best for you. However, this is a potentially more dangerous time of day since you are less visible to motorists. Consider getting an exercise buddy since bigger groups are easier to spot than a solo person.

Wear light- or bright-colored clothing and consider reflectors so that you are easier to see by drivers. Make sure that someone knows where you are exercising and when you plan to be back, and stick to populated and well-lit areas. Always walk or jog in the direction of oncoming traffic so you can see who is coming.

Always make sure that you know how to perform the exercise and use the equipment properly before beginning. For example, using a rowing machine improperly can cause back injury, while holding a tennis racket incorrectly increases your chances of developing tennis elbow. Whenever possible, you should try to start a new workout routine in the presence of a professional trainer until you get the movement right. Once you are confident in your abilities you can move on to working out on your own.

There are some symptoms that should be considered absolute red lights time to stop symptoms. If you feel any discomfort or pain, it is time to stop. Many injuries occur just because people do not listen to their bodies and then over do it. If you have symptoms of a heart attack, including chest pain, pain in the neck or jaw, or pain traveling down the arm, stop and seek medical help immediately.

If you become breathless to the point you cannot speak or become dizzy or lightheaded it is time to quit. Any rapid or irregular heartbeat is also a warning sign. Also, consider slowing your workout down during periods of illness and injury to prevent serious complications from cropping up.

With a little common sense and some basic precautions, you can have a safe workout. This will prevent injury and allow you to have the most effective workout possible.##

The Importance of Your Shoes in Exercising

Exercising is a way to keep your body healthy, but you need to exercise with the health of your feet in mind, too. If your feet aren't healthy, then you won't be able to exercise without discomfort or pain. You'll more than likely lose your passion for it. That's why your shoes are such a valuable part of your routine. If you do have a problem with your feet, bad shoes won't help them at all. Know what to look for in your shoes when shopping for them.

If you are serious about running or jogging for your exercise routine, then don't buy a pair of shoes that are cheap in price. You get what you pay for as the old saying goes, so be prepared to shell out a few extra bucks for your shoes.

Besides, there's a lot more at stake than just your feet. Your back and spine take a pounding when you're running, so take this into account, too. A pinched nerve in your back or legs could put you out of the game for a very long time. Professionals use good shoes, and so should you.

Pronation is how your foot hits the ground, or rather how you walk in shoes. Some people walk to the outside of their feet, while others walk more to the inside. You can tell what your pronation is by looking at some of your older shoes. The shoe's canvas will either be pushed to the left or right on each shoe.

Another way to see what side is by putting your foot in some water, and then step naturally onto a dry colored sheet of paper. This will determine for sure how you walk. The pattern will indicate outside walking if it's a thin line, and inside if your whole footprint can be seen.

After you determine how you pronate, you'll need to look at your arch. For your shoes to fit correctly you have to be able to see how high or low you're the arch of your foot is. All people have a different arch, so take this into account when looking for shoes. You don't want a pair of shoes that are too tight at the arch because it will cut off blood flow, and it can damage nerves after a period of time to the toes. If you have any vascular problems, such as diabetic neuropathy, it's very important to watch the arch height.

After you've gotten your walking style and arch type go out shopping. It would be a great idea to do a print again of your foot again, but late in the afternoon. When you take another print, go ahead and mark the outline exactly with a pencil or pen, and take it with you shopping later in the day.

Go to a quality shoe store, preferably one that only sells sports gear. Remember, quality is the most important factor in buying your exercise shoes. Also, take the type of socks that you plan on running or jogging in because it will throw off the fit when you're trying on shoes.

Shoes come in three different styles such as cushioned, motion, and normal. If you've discovered that your feet are flat, you'll have less of a problem with high arches. More people will have low arches, and buy a motion shoe. This type of shoe has a very tight rigid design to them.

Cushioned ones will have the feel of softness, so it will absorb the pounding shock. The outer edges are softer as compared to the motion shoes, and will give a little more on the outside. If you have an even stride, think of yourself as lucky because most people don't have one. Its construction is a combination of the cushioned and motion shoe type.

Finally, make sure to have your feet measured to the inch. You always have one foot that is larger than the other one. That is why a good quality focused sports store that sells shoes is the best place to buy. A sales person will know this fact, and will be precise in measurement. Enjoy running with your new shoes!

The Advantage of Using a Personal Trainer at Your Gym

Using a personal trainer for you to get fit is a great idea. It's hard to stay motivated, and it's even more difficult to stay on top of all the new ways to exercise and get fit. You will have to shell out a few more bucks per month to stay fit, or to get fit, but it'll be worth in for your health and lifestyle. Know why it's good to use a personal trainer, and find out what you have to do to keep healthy once you're using one.

Before you run out and join the local gym, and get your personal trainer, go to your doctor, and get a health exam. An unknown problem with joints, heart, or lungs is not the place to find out about them, at a gym. Besides, it makes common sense to have a yearly physical exam, to catch serious health issues that you might not be aware of yet.

It will cost a little more per month to have a personal trainer at your disposal, but they can talk with you about your goals for health, and target ways to get you to achieve it. They can also evaluate your strengths, and where you need improvement by doing a personal assessment test, before you begin an exercise regime. That helps on eliminating injury and frustration because it's hard to know where to begin, if you're out of shape.

A personal trainer can introduce new types of exercise to target to your goals. If it's been a while since you've been in a gym, or if you're out of shape, a trainer can tell you all about new exercise routines. For example, the popularity of using exercise ball, along with weights has become popular. Also, yoga is now on the rise as one of the top exercise modes to get you healthy.

Using other types of health fitness routines are Pilates, which you might not know about. Not only can this knowledge be powerful to get you fit, it can relieve the boredom of the same type

of routines after you start exercising. A personal trainer can also notice special talents to be developed for a particular sport. You just might find a new hobby or career, by using a personal trainer.

Another great benefit about using one is that many gyms in the country employ personal trainers that can meet you on your basis. Some gyms today have a rotating list of trainers that can meet with you at just about any hour of the day, and you can gain access to the gym by swiping a card to the gym door.

A personal trainer can offer encouragement by positive feedback, and monitor your progress. Using one means that you've taken on the responsibility to make yourself healthy and you can help with the training by committing yourself to show up for every session. They are not your slave drivers, by no means, but are there to push you on and up.

You can continue to improve on fitness by taking the advice of a personal trainer. They can tell you what type of diet would help you, and what other types of exercises that you can do at home that will supplement their instruction.

Also, a trainer can evaluate if you don't need to be exercising because of an injury, and can direct you to excellent doctors, or other health care specialist, that can get you on to the road to recovery in a short amount of time. There are other ways a personal trainer can help too. Your trainer could lead you to other types of classes such as, aerobics, or ice skating that will enhance your overall performance on getting fit.

Finally, remember to stick with your goal of staying healthy. Your personal trainer can't force you to keep appointments, make you eat right, or even to follow the exercise routine at home; only you can do that. It's your health, your time, and your cash that you're forfeiting if you don't use the personal trainer to your full advantage. You can do it; it's just a matter of training your mind, body and spirit to get the best lifestyle for health that you've always wanted.

Personal Fitness Monitoring – Useful Tools for Tracking Progress

If you are starting a personal fitness program, you may wonder how you are ever going to stick with it. Until your workout becomes a routine, it may seem a little overwhelming. Having a fitness journal can help you keep track of everything that you are doing and help keep your goals in mind.

Fitness journals in many styles are available. You can purchase a pre-made book or set up an account online to monitor progress. Or, if you are an organized person, you can come up with your own at your home computer or in a notebook.

Some things to consider are what you are going to use to track your progress. Are you simply monitoring weight loss or will you be keeping track of your diet as well? Are you going for time or distance when jogging? Are you going for the number of repetitions or the amount of weight when strength training?

One of the favorite things for people to track is their weight. To do this most effectively, you will want to check your weight daily. For the most accurate results, weigh nude or just in your underwear at the same time every day. Having a scale in your bathroom means that you can step on it right before stepping into the shower if that is a good time for you to remember.

Weighing daily allows you to keep an eye on your progress. If your weight starts creeping up, it is easier to make a small adjustment to what you are doing than to have to try and drop another 5 pounds at the end of the week. Keep in mind that your weight will have some minor fluctuations from day to day as well.

For some people, keeping track of their weight may not be the most accurate. Muscle weighs more than fat, so if you have a good strength-training regime you may not notice the pounds dropping away yet you could still be slimming down. For these people it may be more efficient to take measurements of the body parts that they are working on, for example hips or waist. There are also tools available that can measure the amount of fat that you have on your body as well.

For all workout programs, it is essential that you are eating a good diet. We all know that candy bars are bad and vegetables are good. But you may not know if you are meeting or exceeding your caloric needs for the day. Keeping a food/nutrition journal can help you do this. Keep track of everything that you eat throughout the day and at what times.

Then you can monitor your intake of calories, fats, sodium, or vitamins as desired. There are many books and websites available with nutritional information for foods that do not come in a plastic wrapper. Try to get as balanced of a look as possible. For example, if you are careful to eat only 2000 calories a day but it all comes from chocolate you are going to be low on the nutritional side of things and sky high in the fat side.

If you are doing an extensive weight training program you may need to take in extra protein but have to watch your calories. Talk things over with a doctor before starting any new nutritional program. He or she can give you specific daily requirements based on your age, health, and workout routine.

A third thing to consider monitoring is your workout itself. Things to consider watching are your heart rate, work out times, work out distances (for cardio activities like walking or jogging), and weight amounts and number of repetitions for strength training. Depending on your fitness goals, you can track your progress.

For example, if you are a beginner jogger, your goal may be to run a mile in under ten minutes. Each day you can see your progress to your goal. A strength trainer might try to do an increasing amount of repetitions each day to tone his body. Everyone can benefit from keeping an eye on their heart rate to make sure that they are not overdoing it.

For whatever monitoring you decide to do, make it visual. Plotting a graph of your progress can help you see a definite progression of your success. Do not get discouraged if you slip for a day or two, instead, use that as motivation to continue to improve yourself. If you find yourself reaching plateaus, consider altering your routines to get them closer to your goal. For

the most accurate results, remember that you have to fill out the information daily. Keep your journal in plain sight where it is easy to remember.

With a little monitoring, you can reach your fitness goals as smoothly as possible.

Ten Tricks to Sneak in Exercise in Your Daily Routine

Exercise is good for you, but if you're like millions of others, you find it hard to commit to a regular exercise routine. In today's busy society getting a little exercise can be a lot frustrating, if you want to stay in shape.

You can get more activity by rearranging how you do things, and still get the daily activity you need. It might not cause you to loose dramatic amounts of weight, but it will keep your heart pumping in a healthy way. Read on to learn a few tricks of the trade on getting enough cardiovascular health everyday.

Getting a little exercise is better than doing nothing at all. Becoming a couch potato is not healthy, and you can't have the excuse or explanation that you just don't have the time, by following a few of these simple tricks. In fact you can make up your own, or modify the ideas too. Even minimal exercise will help you loose some weight, so if you're wanting to do that, then let it encourage you to push forward and do it. There is no opportunity like today to get active and to be healthy.

Because Americans are so out of shape they need some form of exercise according to the American Heart Association. It's important to remember though, never take on any exercise program if you have any serious health issues. Always check with your doctor and get their stamp of approval.

You don't want to cause any damage to an already existing health problem. With that said, the American Heart Association endorses anything that gets your heart pumping vigorously, and at an elevated rate for an amount of time. This benefits the heart and the other large muscle groups in your body. It will gradually help you loose weight too.

There are a lot of ways that you can incorporate exercise daily. One way is to set the care keys down, and walk to your home or office, weather permitting of course. You don't have to jog or run there, but a quick step with arms swing in rhythm, will burn at least 150 calories for 15 minutes. It will get your heart rate up, and your large muscle groups will get a nice workout. Stairs are another option in getting your heart rate up.

Two flights of stairs, at a timed stepped, will burn some more calories too. At least 36 calories will be taken out of your body and clogged arteries of your heart. Another way to get your heart rate up is to go and do what a lot of others love to do, sight seeing at your local mall. Look around in the shop's windows and you'll burn calories, but your heart rate will go up too.

There are unusual ways to exercise when doing your daily routine of chores around the house. If you're standing at the kitchen sink, grab the mayonnaise bottle and do a few arm curls. This

will isolate the muscles in the arm with an exercise that will give you strength in an area that you might not target everyday. If you're out waiting for a ride to pick you up, use that time to do a little stretching and relaxing your muscles.

Stretching and relaxing your muscle groups is just as important as exercise. Besides, if you stretch and practice relaxation movements you'll stop the soreness from exercising, and you'll prevent injury from pulled muscles and ligaments. Mentally, it'll release hormones called endorphins that will help you feel invigorated.

You can do the stretching and relaxation techniques at home, work, or anywhere that allows a little room. If you're at work, bend over in your chair, and gently stretch with your fingertips touching your toes. Do it repetitively so you'll get the full benefit of it. Get up and walk around, stretching the other direction in a fluid motion.

You can do side to side exercises standing up, by moving left and the right, you'll get the muscles in your side tighter, and have a flatter tummy. Also, make sure to concentrate on the areas of your back and upper shoulders, by wrapping your hands around your back, and holding that position for a few seconds. This type of movement and exercise also helps straighten out bad posture problems.

Finally, remember to keep active so you'll stay healthy. Moving a little bit everyday, at least 30 minutes will give you a lot of health benefits in the long run. It only takes a little imagination and concentration, and you'll be healthier than you were before you started. Just stick with the program, for a healthier you.

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