REAP THE REWARDS OF PERSONAL TRAINING

All the rich and famous celebrities have one. In fact, some are rich and famous themselves. But you don't have to be either one to reap the benefits of hiring a personal trainer. More and more people, novice and veteran exercisers alike, are working with personal trainers because they offer a practical and affordable means of getting and staying healthy.

A TRAINER FOR EVERY BODY

Many automatically equate personal training with gyms full of hard-core strength trainers and body builders. This is only part of the picture. Anyone, young and old, in shape and out, can utilize a personal trainer for a variety of reasons. For example, many professional and amateur athletes work with a personal trainer during the off-season to prepare themselves for in-season competition. Individuals recovering from an injury or accident may enlist the help of a personal trainer (in conjunction with their physical therapist) to get them back in top form. The work of a majority of personal trainers focuses on increasing and/or maintaining their clients' fitness levels, assisting them in weight loss and overseeing their strength-training and cardiovascular activities. Strength training, in particular, has received increased recognition in recent years because the lack of strength is now known to be a risk factor for disease, especially for older populations.

TAILOR-MADE TRAINING

Personal trainers wear many hats, serving not only as coach, but also as confidant, role model, educator and a major source of motivation and encouragement. Some people may want constant supervision two to three times a week, which makes them more likely to stick to their program because they are accountable to someone else for their exercise time. Others may prefer to see a trainer only on occasion to update their exercise program, or for periodic fitness testing to receive feedback on their progress.

It is the novice exerciser, however, who may find a personal trainer most valuable. Working with a personal trainer for a few sessions is often all it takes for some people to feel comfortable with independent exercise. The following describes the most common services offered to those beginning an exercise program:

1. Fitness evaluation. This is a series of tests designed to assess cardiovascular fitness, body-fat percentage, flexibility and muscular strength and endurance.

2. Personalized exercise program. An individualized exercise program is designed based on the individual's fitness evaluation results and personal fitness and health goals.

3. Supervised exercise. Personal attention during exercise is the primary function of personal trainers. Clients are given a detailed orientation that addresses the aerobic, strength and flexibility components of the exercise program, and are educated about the fundamentals of strength and aerobic training, as well as the proper and safe use of equipment.

CHOOSING ONE THAT FITS

Once you have made the decision to hire a personal trainer, all that is left is to find one that best suits your needs. Of course, you want a personal trainer that is certified by the American Council on Exercise. (Call 800-529-8227 to locate the ACE-certified Personal Trainer nearest you.) This is your assurance that you're working with a trainer who has the knowledge to provide you with a safe and effective workout. Don't hesitate to ask for references, and be sure that the trainer has liability insurance and provides business policies in writing. Rates will vary, depending on the trainer's experience and the length and location of the workout session. While some health clubs offer personal training services to their members at reduced rates, most personal trainers typically charge $25 to $50 per hour for their services.

Finally, ask yourself if you could get along well with the trainer and whether or not they seem genuinely interested in helping you. If they meet all your other prerequisites, this is the trainer to hire. Together, you and your trainer can determine your best route to better health and fitness.