

'Cybertraining' proves convenient

Patricia Zapor/CNS

So, you'd really like to use a personal trainer to keep your exercise program on track, but the hours at the "Y" just don't fit into your schedule or you live too far from a gym.

Either that, or you've got a basement full of expensive exercise equipment and now you can't afford the cost of hiring someone to come over to give you advice about using the machines in a workout plan.

Online personal training is only a click away.

The American Council on Exercise somewhat begrudgingly admits that "cybertraining" can be effective, albeit as a supplement to working in person with a trainer.

For prices ranging from about \$20 a month, with a year's membership, companies evaluate your fitness goals, your height, weight, age and health condition, and what equipment you have available, if any.

My Fitness Expert is typical of some of the better-established companies. It begins by matching members with a trainer. Participants can also choose their own trainer, based on descriptions of their staff members' approach to fitness. Members and their trainers work out an exercise plan together. Membership includes access to tools such as a library of instructions for how to perform certain exercises correctly.

Other companies, such as Gold's Gym, use the Web-based programs as a supplement for visits to their own gyms.

The exercise federation offers

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some tips for choosing a qualified online trainer, including:

- Check the qualifications of the staff. My Fitness Expert allows non-members to see background material on its trainers. Other sites limit access to members. The American Council on Exercise recommends choosing a trainer with a college degree in an exercise-related field and with certification by organizations, such as their own, the American College of Sports Medicine or the National Strength and Conditioning Association.

- Before joining, consider how easy the site is to use, including studying a sample workout plan.

- Be sure the program includes a way to contact your trainer. An e-mail address is typically provided, but some also offer a toll-free number so you can speak to a trainer in person.

- Avoid sites that push nutritional supplement programs. Unless trainers are also registered dietitians, their advice shouldn't go beyond the basic food guide "pyramid."

The following are some of the Web addresses of companies offering Web-based personal trainers and a bit of information about each:

- www.fitadvisor.com, targeted toward employers that contract with Fitadvisor to provide workers with an inexpensive fitness program.

- www.fitsite.com, starts with a \$49.99 fitness plan with updates every six to eight weeks for \$25.



- www.myfitnessexpert.com, offers information about trainers without first joining.

- www.workout.com, includes materials aimed at exercise professionals.

EDITOR'S NOTE: To check the cre-

dentials of online personal trainers, these organizations can help: the American Council on Exercise, www.acefitness.org; the American College of Sports Medicine, www.acsm.org; or the National Strength and Conditioning Association, www.nscacc.org.

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