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### What trainers need to do to train you

By FEATURE

Last year more than 4.6 million Americans hired personal trainers to stretch, pull, and push their bodies into better shape. While individualized training has been around for years, the roles of personal trainers have evolved along with their popularity. What was once seen as a profession of pushy coaches yelling at clients "to give me one more pushup" now includes an expanded expertise in food and nutrition, psychological evaluation, and exercise.

In short, personal trainers are now responsible for the entire person, not just the parts with cellulite. To guarantee such expertise, trainers are required to become certified in at least one specific area by national agencies governing their industry.

"We're here to guide people on their way to a healthy and happy life," said local trainer and fitness-center owner Tonya Tittle. "This sounds weird, but actually we don't want our clients to get hooked on us."

In the cozy atmosphere of Tittle's studio, Energy Fitness, it is easy to see how clients could get attached. The studio, which opened in August 2002 and is located at 265 S. Front, has about 50 clients helped by Tittle and four other trainers.

To provide such personalized service, each trainer faces strenuous and standardized evaluations, examinations, and continuing education. This type of training is necessary for client safety, says Stephanie Maks, an assistant director for the certification organization, the National Exercise Trainers Association (NETA). As one of the major certification groups, NETA teaches trainers how to handle clients and lead classes, and then tests them on those skills. "We require that trainers or people wanting to become trainers have a degree in a related field -- exercise science and exercise psychology -- or be already certified through another agency," she explains.

The Minneapolis-based organization offers these fitness professionals certification in group exercise, Pilates, and personal training. The personal-training certification consists of a two-day, 14-hour session of lectures, an exercise-science refresher course, and a written examination. Certification is valid for two years. To maintain accreditation, personal trainers with NETA certification must also complete 15 hours of continuing education every two years.

Since its inception 28 years ago, NETA has certified more than 110,000 fitness professionals. The organization hosted a training workshop in Memphis last year and will return in May for another session at Lindenwood Christian Church. "Many of the people seeking certification are those leaving regular 9-to-5 jobs who want to do something different," says Maks.

But certification is not cheap. For the NETA personal-training session, enrollees pay almost \$400 in registration fees, plus an additional \$110 in workshop materials.

The Energy Fitness trainers have various certifications, including personal training, Pilates, group exercise, health sports fitness, kickboxing, and several others. Each of these certifications is accompanied by its own set of guidelines, examinations, and costs. And because fitness is a constantly changing industry, trainers must stay updated on the latest exercises, equipment, and industry trends. Whereas the "step" was the equipment of choice a few years ago, it has now been replaced with the "ramp" -- same concept, but the incline is easier on the knees and allows for an increased range of movements.

In addition to the national certifications, some fitness centers require their trainers to have additional training. In the 24-Hour Fitness chain, which has an East Memphis location, personal training applicants must be CPR-certified, pass the company's pre-certification exam, and attend a five-day certification class. Once those steps are successfully completed, applicants must undergo an additional two to three weeks of in-club training and shadow other trainers before working with clients, says company spokesperson Shannon May.

"There are about 300 certifications that [fitness professionals] can get now," says Tittle, "and in the past they were not all standardized. There was a time when anyone -- whether degreed or not and even with no training -- was getting certifications. In the last three to four years, trainers have been required to have a related degree. There is even a national board in the works to monitor the certification process."

For Tittle, who has been in the fitness industry since 1992, the requirements and standardization are welcome additions to her profession. "You would be surprised at the number of people who never inquire about the certifications of their trainer," she says. "That should be one of the first questions you ask. You have to guarantee that the person training you knows what they are doing." n

-- By Janel Davis --

### **What To Look for In a Personal Trainer**

- Education: A personal trainer should be certified through a reputable fitness organization such as the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), American Council on Exercise (ACE), or National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA). An exercise science or other related college degree isn't necessary, but the more education your trainer has, the better your workouts will be.
- CPR: Your trainer should have an updated certification in CPR and/or first aid.
- Experience: Make sure your trainer has several years of experience, especially in relation to your goals. For example, if you're a bodybuilder, you want someone knowledgeable in that area.
- Specifics: If you have a specific medical problem, injury, or condition (such as being pregnant, heart problems, diabetes, etc.), make sure your trainer has education in these areas and will work with your doctor.

- A good listener: A good trainer will listen closely to what you say and make sure he understands your goals.
- Attention: A good trainer will be focused only on you during your sessions.
- Tracking progress: A good trainer will regularly assess your progress and change things if necessary.

Source: About.com/exercise

Date created: 01/28/2005

URL for this story: <http://www.memphisflyer.com/memphis/Content?oid=6164>