
Fitness Workers

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Significant Points

- Many fitness and personal training jobs are part time, but many workers increase their hours by working at several different facilities or at clients' homes.
- Night and weekend hours are common.
- Most fitness workers need to be certified.
- Job prospects are expected to be good.

Nature of the Work

Fitness workers lead, instruct, and motivate individuals or groups in exercise activities, including cardiovascular exercise, strength training, and stretching. They work in health clubs, country clubs, hospitals, universities, yoga and Pilates studios, resorts, and clients' homes. Increasingly, fitness workers also are found in workplaces, where they organize and direct health and fitness programs for employees of all ages. Although gyms and health clubs offer a variety of exercise activities such as weightlifting, yoga, cardiovascular training, and karate, fitness workers typically specialize in only a few areas.

Personal trainers work one-on-one with clients either in a gym or in the client's home. They help clients assess their level of physical fitness and set and reach fitness goals. Trainers also demonstrate various exercises and help clients improve their exercise techniques. They may keep records of their clients' exercise sessions to monitor clients' progress toward physical fitness. They may also advise their clients on how to modify their lifestyle outside of the gym to improve their fitness.

Group exercise instructors conduct group exercise sessions that usually include aerobic exercise, stretching, and muscle conditioning. Cardiovascular conditioning classes are often set to music. Instructors choose and mix the music and choreograph a corresponding exercise sequence. Two increasingly popular conditioning methods taught in exercise classes are Pilates and yoga. In these classes, instructors demonstrate the different moves and positions of the particular method; they also observe students and correct those who are doing the exercises improperly. Group exercise instructors are responsible for ensuring that their classes are motivating, safe, and challenging, yet not too difficult for the participants.

Fitness directors oversee the fitness-related aspects of a health club or fitness center. They create and oversee programs that meet the needs of the club's members, including new member orientations, fitness assessments, and workout incentive programs. They also select fitness equipment; coordinate personal training and group exercise programs; hire, train, and supervise fitness staff; and carry out administrative duties.

Fitness workers in smaller facilities with few employees may perform a variety of functions in addition to their fitness duties, such as tending the front desk, signing up new members, giving tours of the fitness center, writing newsletter articles, creating posters and flyers, and supervising the weight training and cardiovascular equipment areas. In larger commercial facilities, personal trainers are often required to sell their services

to members and to make a specified number of sales. Some fitness workers may combine the duties of group exercise instructors and personal trainers, and in smaller facilities, the fitness director may teach classes and do personal training.

Work environment. Most fitness workers spend their time indoors at fitness centers and health clubs. Fitness directors and supervisors, however, typically spend most of their time in an office. Those in smaller fitness centers may split their time among office work, personal training, and teaching classes. Directors and supervisors generally engage in less physical activity than do lower-level fitness workers. Nevertheless, workers at all levels risk suffering injuries during physical activities.

Since most fitness centers are open long hours, fitness workers often work nights and weekends and even occasional holidays. Some may travel from place to place throughout the day, to different gyms or to clients' homes, to maintain a full work schedule.

Fitness workers generally enjoy a lot of autonomy. Group exercise instructors choreograph or plan their own classes, and personal trainers have the freedom to design and implement their clients' workout routines.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

For most fitness workers, certification is critical. Personal trainers usually must have certification to begin working with clients or with members of a fitness facility. Group fitness instructors may begin without a certification, but they are often encouraged or required by their employers to become certified.

Education and training. Fitness workers usually do not receive much on-the-job training; they are expected to know how to do their jobs when they are hired. Workers may receive some organizational training to learn about the operations of their new employer. They occasionally receive specialized training if they are expected to teach or lead a specific method of exercise or focus on a particular age or ability group. Because the requirements vary from employer to employer, it may be helpful to contact your local fitness centers or other potential employers to find out what background they prefer before pursuing training.

The education and training required depends on the specific type of fitness work: personal training, group fitness, or a specialization such as Pilates or yoga each need different prepara-



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tion. Personal trainers often start out by taking classes to become certified. They then may begin by working alongside an experienced trainer before being allowed to train clients alone. Group fitness instructors often get started by participating in exercise classes until they are ready to successfully audition as instructors and begin teaching class. They also may improve their skills by taking training courses or attending fitness conventions. Most employers require instructors to work toward becoming certified.

Training for Pilates and yoga instructors is changing. Because interest in these forms of exercise has exploded in recent years, the demand for teachers has grown faster than the ability to train them properly. However, because inexperienced teachers have contributed to student injuries, there has been a push toward more standardized, rigorous requirements for teacher training.

Pilates and yoga teachers need specialized training in their particular method of exercise. For Pilates, training options range from weekend-long workshops to year-long programs, but the trend is toward requiring more training. The Pilates Method Alliance has established training standards that recommend at least 200 hours of training; the group also has standards for training schools and maintains a list of training schools that meet the requirements. However, some Pilates teachers are certified group exercise instructors who attend short Pilates workshops; currently, many fitness centers hire people with minimal Pilates training if the applicants have a fitness certification and group fitness experience.

Training requirements for yoga teachers are similar to those for Pilates teachers. Training programs range from a few days to more than 2 years. Many people get their start by taking yoga; eventually, their teachers may consider them ready to assist or to substitute teach. Some students may begin teaching their own classes when their yoga teachers think they are ready; the teachers may even provide letters of recommendation. Those who wish to pursue teaching more seriously usually pursue formal teacher training.

Currently, there are many training programs through the yoga community as well as programs through the fitness industry. The Yoga Alliance has established training standards requiring at least 200 training hours, with a specified number of hours in areas including techniques, teaching methodology, anatomy, physiology, and philosophy. The Yoga Alliance also registers schools that train students to its standards. Because some schools may meet the standards but not be registered, prospective students should check the requirements and decide if particular schools meet them.

An increasing number of employers require fitness workers to have a bachelor's degree in a field related to health or fitness, such as exercise science or physical education. Some employers allow workers to substitute a college degree for certification, but most employers who require a bachelor's degree also require certification.

Certification and other qualifications. Most personal trainers must obtain certification in the fitness field to gain employment. Group fitness instructors do not necessarily need certification to begin working. The most important characteristic that an employer looks for in a new fitness instructor is

the ability to plan and lead a class that is motivating and safe. However, most organizations encourage their group instructors to become certified over time, and many require it.

In the fitness field, there are many organizations—some of which are listed in the last section of this statement—that offer certification. Becoming certified by one of the top certification organizations is increasingly important, especially for personal trainers. One way to ensure that a certifying organization is reputable is to see that it is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies.

Most certifying organizations require candidates to have a high school diploma, be certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and pass an exam. All certification exams have a written component, and some also have a practical component. The exams measure knowledge of human physiology, proper exercise techniques, assessment of client fitness levels, and development of appropriate exercise programs. There is no particular training program required for certifications; candidates may prepare however they prefer. Certifying organizations do offer study materials, including books, CD-ROMs, other audio and visual materials, and exam preparation workshops and seminars, but exam candidates are not required to purchase materials to take exams.

Certification generally is good for 2 years, after which workers must become recertified by attending continuing education classes or conferences, writing articles, or giving presentations. Some organizations offer more advanced certification, requiring an associate or bachelor's degree in an exercise-related subject for individuals interested in training athletes, working with people who are injured or ill, or advising clients on general health.

Pilates and yoga instructors usually do not need group exercise certifications to maintain employment. It is more important that they have specialized training in their particular method of exercise. However, the Pilates Method Alliance does offer certification.

People planning fitness careers should be outgoing, excellent communicators, good at motivating people, and sensitive to the needs of others. Excellent health and physical fitness are important due to the physical nature of the job. Those who wish to be personal trainers in a large commercial fitness center should have strong sales skills. All personal trainers should have the personality and motivation to attract and retain clients.

Advancement. A bachelor's degree in exercise science, physical education, kinesiology (the study of muscles, especially the mechanics of human motion), or a related area, along with experience, usually is required to advance to management positions in a health club or fitness center. Some organizations require a master's degree. As in other occupations, managerial skills are also needed to advance to supervisory or managerial positions. College courses in management, business administration, accounting, and personnel management may be helpful, but many fitness companies have corporate universities in which they train employees for management positions.

Personal trainers may advance to head trainer, with responsibility for hiring and overseeing the personal training staff and for bringing in new personal training clients. Group fitness instructors may be promoted to group exercise director, respon-

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Fitness trainers and aerobics instructors	39-9031	235,000	298,000	63,000	27

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

sible for hiring instructors and coordinating exercise classes. Later, a worker might become the fitness director, who manages the fitness budget and staff. Workers might also become the general manager, whose main focus is the financial aspects of an organization, particularly setting and achieving sales goals; in a small fitness center, however, the general manager is usually involved with all aspects of running the facility. Some workers go into business for themselves and open their own fitness centers.

Employment

Fitness workers held about 235,000 jobs in 2006. Almost all personal trainers and group exercise instructors worked in physical fitness facilities, health clubs, and fitness centers, mainly in the amusement and recreation industry or in civic and social organizations. About 8 percent of fitness workers were self-employed; many of these were personal trainers, while others were group fitness instructors working on a contract basis with fitness centers. Many fitness jobs are part time, and many workers hold multiple jobs, teaching or doing personal training at several different fitness centers and at clients' homes.

Job Outlook

Jobs for fitness workers are expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations. Fitness workers should have good opportunities due to rapid job growth in health clubs, fitness facilities, and other settings where fitness workers are concentrated.

Employment change. Employment of fitness workers is expected to increase 27 percent over the 2006-2016 decade, much faster than the average for all occupations. These workers are expected to gain jobs because an increasing number of people are spending time and money on fitness, and more businesses are recognizing the benefits of health and fitness programs for their employees.

Aging baby boomers are concerned with staying healthy, physically fit, and independent. Moreover, the reduction of physical education programs in schools, combined with parents' growing concern about childhood obesity, has resulted in rapid increases in children's health club membership. Increasingly, parents are also hiring personal trainers for their children, and the number of weight-training gyms for children is expected to continue to grow. Health club membership among young adults also has grown steadily, driven by concern with physical fitness and by rising incomes.

As health clubs strive to provide more personalized service to keep their members motivated, they will continue to offer personal training and a wide variety of group exercise classes. Participation in yoga and Pilates is expected to continue to increase, driven partly by the aging population that demands

low-impact forms of exercise and seeks relief from arthritis and other ailments.

Job prospects. Opportunities are expected to be good for fitness workers because of rapid job growth in health clubs, fitness facilities, and other settings where fitness workers are concentrated. In addition, many job openings will stem from the need to replace the large numbers of workers who leave these occupations each year. Part-time jobs will be easier to find than full-time jobs.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of fitness trainers and aerobics instructors in May 2006 were \$25,910. The middle 50 percent earned between \$18,010 and \$41,040. The bottom 10 percent earned less than \$14,880, while the top 10 percent earned \$56,750 or more. These figures do not include the earnings of the self-employed. Earnings of successful self-employed personal trainers can be much higher. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of fitness workers in 2006 were as follows:

General medical and surgical hospitals.....	\$29,640
Local government	27,720
Fitness and recreational sports centers.....	27,200
Other schools and instruction.....	22,770
Civic and social organizations	22,630

Because many fitness workers work part time, they often do not receive benefits such as health insurance or retirement plans from their employers. They are able to use fitness facilities at no cost, however.

Related Occupations

Other occupations that focus on physical fitness include athletes, coaches, umpires, and related workers. Physical therapists also do related work when they create exercise plans to improve their patients' flexibility, strength, and endurance. Dietitians and nutritionists advise individuals on improving and maintaining their health, like fitness workers do. Also like fitness workers, many recreation workers lead groups in physical activities.

Sources of Additional Information

For more information about fitness careers and universities and other institutions offering programs in health and fitness, contact:

- ▶ IDEA Health and Fitness Association, 10455 Pacific Center Court., San Diego, CA 92121-4339.
 - ▶ National Strength and Conditioning Association, 1885 Bob Johnson Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80906.
- Internet: <http://www.nscf-lift.org>

For information about personal trainer and group fitness instructor certifications, contact:

- American College of Sports Medicine, P.O. Box 1440, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1440. Internet: <http://www.acsm.org>
- American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Dr., San Diego, CA 92123. Internet: <http://www.acefitness.org>
- National Academy of Sports Medicine, 26632 Agoura Rd., Calabasas, CA 91302. Internet: <http://www.nasm.org>
- NSCA Certification Commission, 3333 Landmark Circle, Lincoln, NE 68504. Internet: <http://www.nscacc.org>

For information about Pilates certification and training programs, contact:

- Pilates Method Alliance, P.O. Box 370906, Miami, FL 33137-0906.

Internet: <http://www.pilatesmethodalliance.org>

For information on yoga teacher training programs, contact:

- Yoga Alliance, 7801 Old Branch Ave., Suite 400, Clinton, MD 20735. Internet: <http://www.yogaalliance.org>

To find accredited fitness certification programs, contact:

- National Commission for Certifying Agencies, 2025 M St., NW., Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036.

Internet: <http://www.ncca.org/ncca/accredorg.htm>

For information about health clubs and sports clubs, contact:

- International Health, Racquet, and Sportsclub Association, 263 Summer St., Boston, MA 02210.

Internet: <http://www.ihrsa.org>