

# FITNESS FACTS

## Health Spas: Exercise Your Rights

(NAPSA)—If you're thinking of getting in shape by joining a health club, you're not alone. Nearly 33 million people are members of some 17,000 health clubs in the U.S. today.

Although most consumers who join health clubs are pleased with their choices, others are not. To avoid the problems of high-pressure sales tactics, misrepresentation of facilities and services, broken promises about cancellations and refunds, here are some suggestions from experts at the Federal Trade Commission:

### Inspect The Spa

- Look closely at the spa's fees, contractual requirements and facilities before you join. Then, inspect the spa. Visit the spa during the hours you would normally use it to see if it's overcrowded. Notice whether the facilities are clean and well-maintained, and note the condition of the equipment. Ask about:

- Trial periods. Is there sometime when you can sample the services and equipment for free?

- Number of members. Many spas set no membership limits. While the spa may not be crowded when you visit, it may be packed during peak hours or after a membership drive.

- Hours of operation. Some spas restrict men's use to certain days and women's to others. Some may limit lower-cost memberships to certain hours.

- Instructors and trainers. Some spas hire trainers and instructors who have special qualifications. If you're looking for professionals to help you, ask about staff qualifications and longevity.

### Review the Contracts

Some spas ask you to join—and pay—the first time you visit and offer incentives like special rates to entice you to sign on the spot. Resist. Wait a few days before deciding. Take the contract home and read it carefully. Before you sign, ask yourself:



Is everything that the salesperson promised written in the contract? If a problem arises after you join, the contract probably will govern the dispute.

Could you get a refund for the unused portion of your membership if you had to cancel, say, because of a move or an injury? What if you simply stopped using the spa? Will the spa refund your money? Knowing the spa's cancellation policies is especially important if you choose a long-term membership.

It may be to your advantage to join on a trial basis, say, for a few months, even if it costs a little more each month.

### Research the Spa's History

Finally, before you join a health club, contact your local consumer protection office, state Attorney General or Better Business Bureau to find out whether they have received any complaints about the business.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357), or visit [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov).