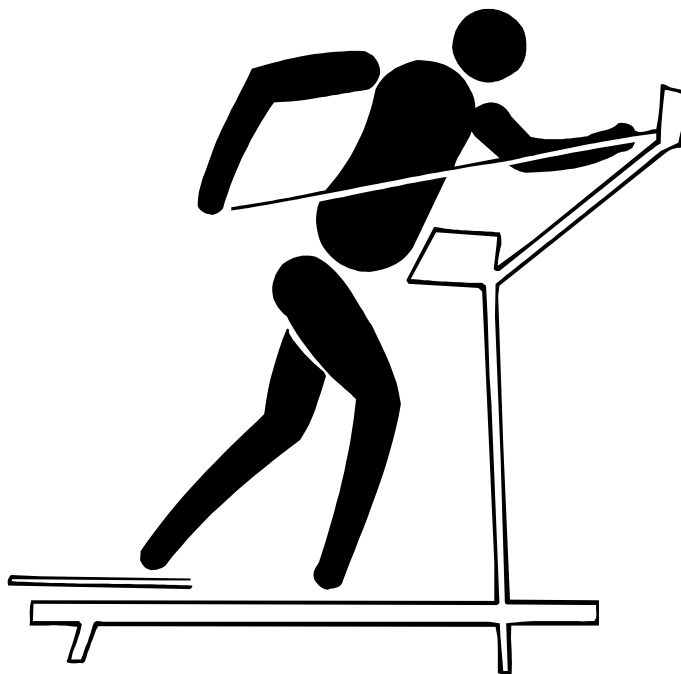


Pump Fiction



he benefits of exercise are well-documented. Unfortunately, that's not always the case with advertising claims for exercise equipment.




Some advertisers claim — without evidence — that their exercise products offer a quick, easy way to shape up, keep fit, and lose weight. The truth is, there's no such thing as a no-work, no-sweat way to a healthy, toned body. Deriving the benefits of exercise requires doing the work.

Before you jump into the next home fitness fad, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers this advice: Exercise good judgment and evaluate advertising claims for exercise products carefully.

Facts for Consumers

Evaluating Claims

Read the performance claims critically. Be leery of those that say the equipment or device can:



-  provide easy or effortless results or burn excessive calories. The claims may be true for athletes in top physical condition, but not for most people.
-  help you burn more calories or lose weight faster than other types of equipment. In general, exercise equipment that works the whole body or major parts of it probably helps you burn more calories than devices that work one part of the body. And, the more you use the equipment, the more calories you'll burn. That's a good reason to select equipment that suits you and your lifestyle. A study might show that one type of equipment burns more calories per hour than another type. But if the exercise is uncomfortable — or the equipment hard to use — chances are it will gather dust — not help you burn calories.
-  help you “spot” reduce; for example, help you trim your hips or lose the proverbial “spare tire.” Toning and losing weight in one particular area of the body require regular exercise that works the whole body. Your weight depends on the number of calories you eat and use each day; increasing your physical activity helps you burn extra calories.

Always read the fine print. The advertised results may be based on more than just the use of the machine; they also may be based on restricting calories. The fine print may explain this. Even if it doesn't, keep in mind that diet and exercise together are much more effective for achieving a healthy, toned body than either tactic is alone.

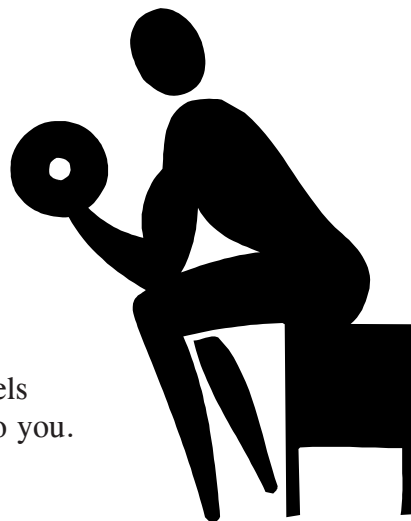
Be skeptical of testimonials or before-and-after pictures from “satisfied” customers. Their experiences may not be typical: Just because one person had success with the equipment doesn't mean you will, too. As for those popular celebrity endorsements, they, too, are no proof that the equipment will work as claimed.

Finding the Right Equipment

After you've evaluated the advertised claims — but before you make a final purchasing decision — consider these questions:

-  Will the equipment help you achieve your desired goal — whether it's to build strength, increase flexibility, improve endurance, or enhance your health?
-  Will you stick to the program? Keeping with an exercise program can be rough: Think of all the basements, rec rooms and yard sales stocked with costly stationary bikes, treadmills and rowing machines that have gone unused and now serve merely as places to hang clothes. Before you buy, prove to yourself that you're ready to act on your good intentions.

To help you choose the best equipment for your needs, check out consumer and fitness magazines that rate exercise equipment. Then test various pieces of equipment at a local gym, recreation center or retailer to find the machine or device that feels comfortable to you.



Shop around: Exercise equipment advertised on TV or in newspapers or magazines may be available at local sporting goods, department and discount stores. That can make it easier to shop for the best price. Don't be fooled by companies that advertise "three easy payments of ..." or "only \$49.95 a month." The advertised price may not include shipping and handling fees, sales tax, and delivery and set-up fees. Ask about the costs before you close the deal.

Get details on warranties, guarantees and return policies: A "30-day money-back guarantee" may not sound as good if you're responsible for paying a hefty fee to return a bulky piece of equipment you bought.

Check out the company's customer and support services. Call the advertised toll-free number to get an idea of how easy it is to reach a company representative and how helpful he or she is.

You may get a great deal on a piece of fitness equipment from a second-hand store, consignment shop, yard sale, or the classified ads. Buy wisely: Items bought second-hand usually

aren't returnable and don't carry the warranties that new equipment does.

Whether used or new, home exercise equipment can be a great way to shape up — but only if you use it regularly. Don't be taken in by claims of quick, easy and effortless results: There's no such thing as a no-work, no-sweat way to a toned body.

For more about electronic muscle stimulators, see www.fda.gov/cdrh/consumer/ems.html.

For More Information

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, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

Facts for Consumers



Federal Trade Commission
Bureau of Consumer Protection
Office of Consumer and Business Education

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