

Joining a Health Spa: What to Look out for



By Greg Abbott
Attorney General of Texas

The summer is upon us. If you are considering joining a health spa in order to get into shape, you should take into consideration a number of factors. Careful investigation and comparison before joining a health club is key.

Visit several health clubs during the time of day that you plan on working out. Are the facilities crowded? Are the machines, locker rooms, showers and pool clean and well-maintained? Is the staff readily available for assistance? What qualifications or special training do the instructors have?

When speaking to a health club's representative, ask if they offer free trial memberships. If they do, give it a try and see if the spa meets your expectations. If not, it may be to your advantage to pay a little more money and join the health club for only a few months. You can see if it meets your needs and lifestyle. If it doesn't, you won't be obligated to years of payments.

Also, ask how many members the health club has and if there is a limit on the number of people who can join. The health club may not have been crowded during your initial visit, but

if the facility is new, or if you visited during off-peak hours, the number of members may increase significantly.

In addition, find out what days and hours you can use the health club. Some health clubs are open year round, while others are not. If you're interested in putting in some extra work out time during the holidays, get the holiday schedule. Some health clubs have shorter hours or are closed on holidays.

It is wise to take a few days to read the contract thoroughly. Make sure everything the spa's representative promised is written into the contract. What is the health club's cancellation policy and will you be able to get a refund for the unused portion if you do need to cancel? Will you be able to use other branches of the health club or transfer your membership if you move?

When calculating payments, take finance charges and annual percentage rates into consideration. Check the contract for additional sign-up or maintenance fees. Also, calculate the cost per week and per day to give you a better idea of how much you are actually paying to use the health club.

If you will be making a significant payment up front, you should consider what the consequences would be if the health spa closed. This is one of the complaints we hear most often about health spas.

Health spas operating in Texas must be registered with the Secretary of State's Office (SOS). The spa must have an operator's certificate of registration and post a \$20,000 security bond with the SOS. A certificate and bond are required for each spa location. The law does allow for bond exemptions in certain instances. Visit the SOS Web site for the details.

Some health clubs provide child care at their facilities. This can be a very convenient service for parents with children. However, you should contact the Child Care Licensing Division of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services to verify that the child care operation is properly registered.

Another amenity a health spa may offer on site is massage therapy. This may be an appealing service for potential customers. The Texas Department of Health licenses massage therapists for the State of Texas and also accepts complaints. You may wish to check with TDH for information before employing the services of a masseuse.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

HEALTH SPAS

To see if a health spa is registered and bonded with the State:
Secretary of State
www.sos.state.tx.us
(512) 463-5555

To see if complaints have been filed or to file a complaint against a health spa:
Attorney General's Office
www.oag.state.tx.us
(800) 252-8011

To see if a child care facility is registered:
Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
Child Care Licensing Division
www.tdprs.state.tx.us
(800) 252-5400

To find out if a massage therapist is properly licensed:
Texas Department of Health
www.tdh.state.tx.us
(512) 834-6616



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

Information on this and other topics is available on the Attorney General's Web site at www.oag.state.tx.us.