

Lesson 5: Becoming an Informed Fitness Consumer

Introduction

A *consumer* is a person who purchases and/or uses goods and services. When someone buys or uses products or services intended for physical activity or fitness development, the person becomes a *fitness consumer*.

A fitness consumer is faced with having to make a number of choices and decisions. The first decision relates to the required products and/or services. Secondary decisions have to do with where and when to acquire the goods and/or services. What an individual can acquire depends largely on the resources available.

Having as much knowledge as possible about the products and services being considered for purchase allows the consumer to make the best purchasing decisions. The informed consumer also needs to be aware of the factors that influence these decisions.

This lesson focuses on helping students to become critical and effective consumers, which involves evaluating physical fitness products and services. Students have the opportunity to investigate major fitness products and services and develop skills to help them become informed consumers.

NOTE TO TEACHER

Canadian Fitness Industry Statistics

According to the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association, the Canadian health and fitness club industry revenue (USD) totalled approximately 1.8 billion dollars in 2007. There were 4900 clubs in Canada, with a membership of 4.5 million persons, or 15.0% of the population ("Canadian Market Statistics").

REFERENCES



For additional information, refer to the following resources:

Federal Trade Commission (FTC). "Avoiding the Muscle Hustle: Tips for Buying Exercise Equipment." Nov. 2003. *FTP Consumer Alert*.
<www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt113.shtm>.



Fitness Industry Council of Canada. "Canadian Fitness Industry Statistics." *Resources*. 2007.

<www.english.ficdn.ca/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=17>.

International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association (IHRSA). *The 2007 IHRSA Global Report on the State of the Health Club Industry*. Boston, MA: IHRSA, 2007.

---. "Canadian Market Statistics." *Industry Research*.

<<http://cms.ihrsa.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=19014&nodeID=15>>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Specific Learning Outcomes

- 12.FM.6** Examine influences on the decisions that fitness consumers make related to fitness products and services.
- 12.FM.7** Analyze key factors to be considered when purchasing fitness products and/or services.
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Key Understandings

- Some advertising of physical fitness products and services can be misleading.
 - Many fitness goods and services are available to consumers.
 - Consumers can educate themselves prior to making a buying decision.
 - Health and fitness trends affect the availability of consumer products and services.
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Essential Questions

1. What influences your consumer decisions?
 2. How do you determine whether a physical fitness product and/or service will be safe and effective?
 3. How can you become an informed consumer?
 4. What protection does a consumer have?
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Background Information

To make effective consumer decisions, the fitness consumer must be informed about many aspects of fitness development. Knowledge is the key to consumer power. Combining knowledge and understanding about personal needs, habits, and goals, fitness planning, exercise equipment, and facilities will lead to educated decision making. This knowledge and information should be considered when evaluating fitness products and services.

Fitness products include exercise equipment and props, monitoring devices and technology, and “performance” clothing and footwear. Fitness services include access to fitness centres, information and education, personal trainers, and specialty classes and programs. Fitness products and services constitute a multi-billion dollar per year industry in Canada.

Choosing and Buying Fitness Equipment

Physical fitness can be developed and maintained without the use of any equipment, let alone the variety of expensive products and services available. Fitness products and services are extensively advertised and readily available, however, and many of them can be effective.

Buying exercise products may seem simple, but a thorough investigation into the products under consideration is essential. Some products are very expensive due to the research involved in designing and creating them. Many people buy expensive products based on brand names or the assumption that the products will make exercising easier and more convenient.

Initially, individuals may make regular use of the fitness equipment they purchase, but after a period of time, the product may become little more than an awkward and expensive “clothes rack.” Before investing in equipment, people need to understand the financial and lifestyle commitment associated with it.

Considerations for Buying Fitness Equipment*

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) suggests that individuals consider the following tips before buying fitness equipment:

- **Determine the exercise goals.** Whether your goal is to build strength, increase flexibility, improve endurance, or enhance general health, consider a fitness program that meets personal goals. Overall fitness and health can be achieved through a variety of physical activities as part of an active healthy lifestyle, and may not require the use of special equipment.
- **Determine the level of commitment.** The idea of exercising at home may sound very appealing, but using a piece of equipment regularly requires significant motivation. Before buying expensive equipment, assess personal commitment to an ongoing fitness program. Plan to set aside some time daily for physical activity, and follow through with the plan.
- **Evaluate the equipment before buying.** Fitness equipment is manufactured for the general population; therefore, the equipment must be fully adjustable to suit individual body characteristics. The machine or equipment should be sturdy, smooth, and easy to use. When shopping for fitness equipment, go to the store dressed for exercise, and give the equipment a full workout. Measure the area at home where you will put the equipment and note all dimensions (length, width, height). In addition, consider questions such as the following:

* Source of Adaptation: Federal Trade Commission (FTC). “Avoiding the Muscle Hustle: Tips for Buying Exercise Equipment.” Nov. 2003. *FTP Consumer Alert*. <www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt113.shtm>.

- Will the equipment need a source of power?
- How heavy is it?
- Is noise a factor?
- Are you paying for features you will not need?
- Will the equipment need assembly?
- What maintenance will it require?
- What are the safety considerations?
- **Evaluate the advertising claims.** Some companies make unreasonable and outrageous claims to entice the consumer into believing they are true. False or misleading claims are common in the fitness industry. People who are desperately looking for quick fixes to problems that have taken years to develop often make rash and misinformed decisions. If a claim sounds almost too good to be true, it likely is! Check out product reviews. The reviews may point out specific trouble areas for a piece of equipment that may cause difficulties once the equipment is brought home.
- **Shop around.** Much of the advertised fitness equipment is available at local sporting goods, department, or specialty stores. Shop around for the best price. Before you buy any equipment, do the following:
 - Determine the total cost, including shipping and handling, sales tax, delivery, and set-up fees.
 - Obtain the details on warranties, guarantees, and return policies from the retailer and the manufacturer.
 - Investigate the seller's and manufacturer's customer service and support capabilities. Inquire as to whom you can call if repairs or replacement parts are needed.
 - Try the toll-free numbers provided with the equipment to see whether help is truly accessible.

Fitness equipment can often be purchased from second-hand stores, at yard sales, or through classified advertisements in local newspapers. Items bought second-hand are usually not returnable and do not have the warranties of new equipment. Buy wisely.

Equipment Choices

Some common equipment for aerobic exercise, strength training, and other miscellaneous fitness training is identified below.

Aerobic Equipment (Cardiorespiratory and Muscular Endurance)	Strength Training Equipment (Muscular Strength and Endurance)	Miscellaneous Fitness Equipment (Training, Core and Flexibility)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Treadmills▪ Stationary bicycles▪ Ski machines▪ Steppers/climbers▪ Elliptical trainers▪ Rowing machines▪ Aerobic riders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Free weights▪ Multi-station machines▪ Bands and tubing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Heart-rate monitors▪ Pedometers▪ Stability balls▪ Specialized equipment (e.g., medicine balls, agility ladders, balance boards)

Many other fitness gadgets and gimmicks are available on the market. These items, often advertised on television infomercials, are not always of the highest quality and may not deliver on their claims.

It is important to spend the necessary time investigating the exercise equipment being considered for purchase and commit to using the equipment before buying it. After making the purchase, the buyer should take the steps needed to protect the investment and follow the manufacturer's maintenance suggestions. It will be easier to sell equipment that is in good condition, should the equipment no longer be needed or wanted.

NOTE TO TEACHER

Any piece of quality exercise equipment is a good choice if it is used regularly. The consumer is the only one who can truly determine the value of the purchase, based on the results achieved.

Exercise Clothing and Footwear

Having the right clothing and footwear for a chosen activity is important, and sometimes critical. Knowing what the activity demands will be and wearing the right clothing and shoes to meet those demands are important aspects of being an informed fitness consumer.

What we wear during activity can contribute to the activity itself. A well-fitting, well-designed, and activity-appropriate outfit can make the difference between a pleasant activity experience and a negative one.

Every aspect of “performance” or activity clothing, from underwear and socks to outerwear, has been designed around managing and controlling moisture (perspiration and rain), temperature, and wind. Some clothing absorbs moisture, some repels moisture, and some moves or wicks moisture. Still other clothing is created to keep a person cool during activity, or to hold in warmth.

The movement of air also creates challenges for clothing designers. Usually, breathable fabrics are desired by consumers, but sometimes non-breathable fabrics are needed.

Special footwear, specifically designed for a given activity, is available for virtually every activity and sport. Many people purchase footwear that is not designed for the uses it will actually serve. Running footwear is not intended for walking, and walking footwear is not intended for hiking. Tennis footwear is designed differently from volleyball footwear because of the varying movement demands.

When selecting fitness equipment and other products, consumers need to keep in mind the purposes for which they are intended.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Evaluating Fitness Equipment/Products

Have students use the Think-Pair-Share strategy (see Appendix E) to evaluate physical fitness equipment/products:

- Students identify as many fitness products/equipment items as they can.
- Working with a partner or in small groups, students examine the list of identified products, determine the purpose and effectiveness of each product, suggest a less expensive alternative, and rate the overall value.
- Each small group presents its results to the class. Students discuss any discrepancies.

Have students create a *Before You Buy* poster for a fitness product (e.g., home gym, clothing, exercise video). The poster should contain important information about the fitness benefits of the product, as well as tips for buying the product.

REFERENCE



For additional information on fitness product evaluation, refer to the following website:

Ezine Articles. *Health and Fitness: Fitness Equipment*.

<<http://ezinearticles.com/?cat=Health-and-Fitness:Fitness-Equipment>>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at

<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physlth/>.



Background Information

Considerations for Evaluating a Fitness Centre

When deciding on a fitness centre, consumers need to consider criteria such as the following:

- **Price**
 - Do the membership fees or user fees fit your budget?
 - Does the centre offer monthly or seasonal memberships or only long-term memberships? If the centre does not allow a trial period or short-term memberships, consider another facility.
 - Can a friend join a member occasionally for a user fee?
- **Facility**
 - Are you able to tour the centre at the intended time of use?
 - Are the facilities clean and well-maintained?
 - Does the equipment look up to date and well-maintained?
 - Are the exercise areas uncluttered and safe?
 - Do the members follow safe and hygienic practices?
 - Is there appropriate signage for rules and procedures?
 - Does the centre offer other appealing facilities (e.g., sauna, whirlpool)?
- **Staff**
 - Does the centre have enough staff to work with clients?
 - Can you book a staff member to assist with education and programming?
 - Does the staff have fitness leader certification?
 - Does the staff offer clients a personal fitness assessment and is there an initial medical inquiry?
 - Is the centre supervised at all times?
- **Programming**
 - Does the centre offer a variety of fitness programming, such as aerobics, spinning, yoga, and other classes?
 - Are the classes a part of the membership or are participants required to pay additional fees for them?
 - Does the centre have all the machines and free weights needed for personal fitness programming?

- **Satisfaction**
 - How long has the centre been in business? Check out the centre through the local Better Business Bureau or check online for customer satisfaction.
 - What on-site services are available (e.g., towels, hair dryers)?
- **Convenience**
 - Is the centre conveniently located for you?
 - Is the centre accessible by public transportation? Is there ample parking?
 - Are the hours of operation suitable?
 - How crowded is the facility at the time of intended use?
 - Is there enough equipment to keep wait time to a minimum?



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Evaluating a Fitness Centre

Have students identify and examine a physical fitness facility. As part of their fitness centre evaluation, students

- determine the service provider, the service being offered, and the need it is addressing
- identify elements to inquire about or examine before purchasing or subscribing to the service
- address the criteria identified in Considerations for Evaluating a Fitness Centre
- consider the risk factors identified in the applicable Physical Activity Safety Checklist(s)

Depending on availability and scheduling, consider having students visit a fitness centre. If the local community does not have one, students could research one in a neighbouring community (e.g., use the Internet, conduct a phone interview, mail out a questionnaire that includes an envelope with return postage).

Following their fitness centre evaluation, students present their findings to the class.

NOTE TO TEACHER

For this learning experience, students could use the Considerations for Evaluating a Fitness Centre (see previous page). In addition, encourage students to consider the risk factors identified in the applicable Physical Activity Safety Checklists provided in Appendix E of *OUT-of-Class Safety Handbook* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth).

Teachers may choose to invite a fitness program expert to the class to give students an opportunity to try some of the fitness centre offerings (e.g., Pilates, core training, yoga).

REFERENCES



For additional information, refer to the following websites:

Better Business Bureau of Manitoba and Northwest Ontario. Home Page.
<www.bbbmanitoba.ca/>.

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. *OUT-of-Class Safety Handbook: A Resource for Grades 9 to 12 Physical Education/Health Education*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2008. The Physical Activity Safety Checklists are available online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/out_of_class/checklists/>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Advertising an Ideal Fitness Centre

Have students use the information provided in this lesson to

- conceptualize their ideal (fictitious) fitness centre (e.g., name, location, program), using as a guide the criteria specified in Considerations for Evaluating a Fitness Centre
- create an advertisement promoting their ideal fitness centre (e.g., newspaper ad, flyer, brochure, radio ad)

