

evaluating fitness gear

Ready to start or continue your exercise program in the New Year? Wearing fitness apparel that feels good and using accessories that make exercising more effective can help you be successful. However, with dozens of options you may find it challenging to choose the fitness products that best meet your needs.

To help you cut through the confusion, use the simple strategies below. They are from Carrie Myers Smith, an ACSM-certified personal trainer and licensed corporate Wellcoach® in Landaff, New Hampshire, and Amanda Vogel, MA, a fitness professional based in Vancouver, British Columbia, who is the owner of Active Voice Writing Service for fitness professionals.

[1] Choosing Shoes

Here are some questions to ask when trying out athletic shoes.

- ✓ Are the shoes designed for your foot type? Here's what to look for, according to the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA). Motion control shoes are designed on a straight last and are most resistant to twisting and bending; these shoes are best suited for people with low arches. Shoes developed for stability have a slight curve in their shape; they suit people with medium arches, or "normal" feet. Neutral shoes are constructed on a curved last and are the least rigid; these accommodate folks with high arches.
- ✓ Are the shoes sturdy and durable? The APMA says to look for a heel counter that's stiff (not collapsible); a front that bends slightly with the toes, without being too flexible; and a rigid middle section that doesn't twist or bend.
- ✓ What activities will you wear the shoes for? Athletic shoes are meant to

complement specific activities. For example, flexible running shoes are not for indoor cycling; sturdy hiking shoes with ankle support aren't for road running.

- ✓ Do the shoes feel comfortable? Some stores allow you to walk or run around the block in new footwear before buying it.

[2] Selecting Clothing

Use these pointers before purchasing sports bras, fitness wear and specialized gear.

- ✓ Is the garment designed for comfort? Some close-fitting tops and pants offer

ant jackets repel light rain and drizzle, whereas waterproof garments with sealed seams prevent heavier showers from leaking through.

- ✓ Does the sports bra complement your body size and shape? Bra tops that compress the breasts may best suit women with A- and B-cup breasts; women with C-cup breasts or larger may prefer styles that encapsulate the breasts, offering more motion control and support, according to the American Council on Exercise (ACE).

gizmos and gadgets

Ask these questions when considering items like heart rate monitors and pedometers.

- Have any independent studies been done on the product's safety and efficacy?
- Is the product easy to use? Are there too many confusing options that are likely to decrease usability?
- Is the device accurate? To test a heart rate monitor or a pedometer, manually take your heart rate or count steps, and then compare your reading to the reading displayed on the device.
- In the case of a wearable device, is it comfortable and does it stay securely in place? For example, does the pedometer come with a safety clip to keep it firmly attached to the waistband and prevent it from crashing to the pavement?
- What type of battery does the device require? Common alkaline batteries may not last as long but tend to be easier to change than smaller watch batteries.
- Are there extra amenities that go with the product, such as Internet support or software?

flat seams and iron-on labels that reduce chafing and skin irritation.

- ✓ Is the fabric conducive to exercise? Many athletic clothes are constructed of material that wicks sweat away from the skin.
- ✓ Is the clothing functional? Look for details that might hinder performance or interfere with comfort, such as bulky pockets, thick zippers and very low cut tops or low-rise pants.
- ✓ Does outdoor fitness gear allow you to brave the elements? Water-resist-

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