



What to consider when choosing a home gym...

There's a lot to consider when you're thinking about buying home gym equipment. The cost of this type of exercise equipment can run into the thousands of pounds. Working out on a home gym has many benefits that often outweigh the cost. Selecting a home gym suited to your needs isn't an easy process. In this article we'll discuss some of the factors and features of home exercise equipment that should figure into your decision.

A major factor: your fitness goals

This takes some serious reflection on your part. Questions to ask yourself are: Why are you buying a home gym instead of joining a health club that is likely to have better gym equipment? Most people would answer that convenience is an important factor, with cost saving a close second. A home gym can be used by multiple people and thus is more cost effective than individual gym memberships for several household members. What is your ultimate fitness goal? From general fitness and toning to serious bodybuilding, your home gym should have the capacity to support your health and fitness goals, current and future. Your goals will change over time – be sure that the machine is capable of changing with you by allowing you to add additional features to vary your workout. Better home gyms usually have add-on accessories like the leg extension or butterfly attachments. You may not want these accessories when you first use the machine but it's nice to know you can expand the machine to include them

Types of home gyms

Fitness equipment like a home gym enables you to do strength training. Using strength training equipment allows you to exercise with weights that provide resistance. Resistance training works to increase muscle mass, enabling you to tone and sculpt your body. In traditional-style home gyms, resistance comes from a weight stack. Weights can be disc or blocks and are attached to the home gym. A typical weight stack should support weights as low as 5 lbs. with a system of cables and pulleys. Weight stack machines are the work horses of both the health club 10 lbs. and as high as 200 lbs. or more. Recently, home gyms have come on to the market that utilizes bows or heavy-duty elastic bands to provide resistance. These machines are often less expensive than weight-stack models, but require more adjustment and resetting when changing exercises.

Features to look for in a home gym

- Adjustability
- Construction
- Ergonomics and comfort
- Weight range and number of exercises available

- Safety, maintenance, cleaning, lubrication
- Warranty

Adjustability

If the machine isn't easy to adjust, chances are you won't fully use all its features. Be sure the seat is easy to move and that it locks firmly in place. It should be simple to change the resistance level and simple to swap accessories. Adjustability is particularly important if the machine will have multiple users – it shouldn't be a hassle.

Construction

The frame, cables and pulleys are critical features of home gyms. The frame should be made of 11 or 12 gauge tubular steel. Gauge refers to the thickness of the steel. The greater the gauge, the more sturdy, safe and durable the machine will be. Also look for frames that are welded rather than bolted in critical places where stress could become an issue. Cables on the home gym should be able to withstand up to 2500 lbs. of force before breaking. Aircraft cables covered with a nylon coating are best. Don't underestimate the importance of cables – broken cables are a leading cause of injury. Pulleys should be made of nylon, not plastic. Better pulleys contain sealed bearings. Remember that three quarters of the gym's smoothness comes from the quality of the pulleys. Cast iron weight stacks offer the smoothest operation.

Ergonomics and comfort

The gym has to be usable – it should fit your height, size and limb length. People shorter than 5 feet 8 inches should be especially careful to make sure their home gym has an adjustable seat. If you're a larger person in either height or weight, check to see that the machine is tall and wide enough to accommodate you. You shouldn't feel either stretched or cramped when using the gym. Benches should be generously padded and have rounded corners. Handgrips should be covered with rubber or foam padding to provide cushioning and prevent blisters. The best way to evaluate the ergonomics of a machine is to try a variety of exercise. If it's not comfortable in the store, it's likely to be even less comfortable at home.

Weight range and number of exercises available

The weight range of a home gym should accommodate all the people who will be using it. You can exercise to build muscle or just tone and strengthen. Toning requires lower weight and is often preferred by users with general fitness goals. Be sure your machine supports weights as low as 5 or 10 lbs. Although 200 lbs. is the usual upper limit of a weight stack, the machine should be expandable beyond it. A quality home gym should allow you to perform most health club exercises including:

- Leg extension (may require additional attachment or accessory)
- Leg curl (may require additional attachment or accessory)
- Butterfly (may require additional attachment or accessory)
- Bench press
- Bicep curl
- Lat pulldown
- Tricep pushdown
- Leg press
- Squat

- Military press
- Donkey press
- Back of neck press

Safety, maintenance, cleaning, lubrication

If the home gym moves or wobbles when you give it a good shake, you should be concerned about its safety. If the machine is made of lower gauge steel tubing, there's a chance it will flex under load. These unexpected motions can cause injuries. The weight stack should have a cover (shroud) to prevent injury, especially to small children. Be sure that the pin for the weight stack is easy to operate and stays in place. Some pins have a locking mechanism. Better machines will "spot" you – they will allow you to abort an exercise or movement without letting levers or bars strike you. There should be a complete owners manual with the gym, including full information on any maintenance you need to perform. Be sure to follow maintenance procedures carefully to keep your home gym operating safely. Pay special attention to any lubrication requirements and keep the machine clean – by wiping down the frame and bench to remove sweat.

Warranty

The length and scope of the warranty are good indicators of the home gym's quality. A warranty that runs for only a few months should be suspect. The warranty is a good indicator of how much confidence the manufacturer places in the product. A high quality home gym should have a lifetime warranty on the frame. Medium quality units will warrant the frame for at least 10 year. Cables, benches, pads and grips should carry at least a 3 year warranty.

Conclusion

Choosing a home gym can be a complex and daunting process. Check the Internet for reviews and information on the best home gyms. Visit quality fitness retailers and "test drive" several makes and models. Cheap home gyms may be tempting, but resist the temptation if you can – why risk injury just to save a few pounds? Once you're sure what you want, consider purchasing on the Internet. Home gyms on the web are often discounted significantly. Support your fitness goals with quality equipment. Performing strength and conditioning exercises will build lean muscle. Muscle burns more calories than fat – so strength training also supports weight control goals. Be sure to add some cardiovascular exercises to your workout routine to burn even more calories and exercise your most important muscle, your heart. Strength and cardio workouts go hand in hand in any home fitness program. Armed with the right information, you should be able to make an informed decision and purchase a home gym that will give you years of reliable service.