

International  
Council on  
Active Aging



*Changing the Way We Age®*

# How to select an Age-friendly Personal fitness Trainer



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## ICAA questions to ask a personal fitness trainer



*Do not let what you can not do interfere with what you can.*

John Wooden

How do you find the right personal fitness trainer? The best way is to get a referral from someone you know who has a trainer that's great. Ask your friends and family, call your health care provider or inquire at a local health club with a good reputation. Associations and certifying agencies have online directories of personal trainers. You could visit [www.acsm.org](http://www.acsm.org) or [www.ideafit.com](http://www.ideafit.com) or [www.nscs-lift.org](http://www.nscs-lift.org). Once you have a name or two, use the following questions to guide your interview.

By the way, the trainer should be asking you a few questions, too, during an initial interview. The trainer needs to know a bit about you to determine if you are a good fit for her or his skills. The trainer should ask you:

- What are your goals? or What do you want to accomplish with an exercise program?
- Have you exercised before? How did it feel?
- What are your physical limitations?
- Do you have any medical condition I should know about? (eg, cardiovascular disease, diabetes or back pain)
- Have you ever had a joint replacement?
- Are you taking any medications?
- Has your physician or physical therapist cleared you for exercise?

Once you answer these questions, the trainer should know whether she or he has the skills to work with you or whether it is better to refer you to another trainer. You will be asked more questions like these at your first training appointment.

In some cases you won't initially speak with the trainer. You'll speak with a manager who will choose a trainer to work with you. In that case, ask the manager these questions about available trainers. And, the first time you meet, feel free to ask the trainer the same questions.

Just as your health and physical abilities differ from those of your neighbor, so do the skills and personalities of personal trainers differ. It is important that you feel comfortable with a trainer to get the maximum benefit. The questions on the following pages are a starting point to determine which personal trainer is a good match for you.



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**What questions to ask****What answers to look for**

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**Experience**

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Have you had experience training clients of my age?

A trainer with several years experience has a track record of clients you can talk with. However, don't discount a trainer who has a great personality and knowledge. Everyone has to start somewhere.

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How will you decide on an exercise program for my age and activity level?

A program is based on your current fitness level, medical conditions and goals. The program should adapt exercises according to recommendations from your health care provider. The trainer should talk about what you are trying to get from exercise, and find out what activities you like to do.

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Have you had experience working with other people with my medical conditions? (eg, cardiovascular disease, diabetes or back pain)

If you have a medical condition, a trainer with experience is an asset. A trainer cannot treat your condition, but should have a general knowledge and enough information to ask questions of your health care provider and adapt exercises to be safe and effective.

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Have you worked before with a physical therapist or a physician?

If you have a medical condition, it is helpful to find a trainer who can effectively communicate in writing or by telephone with your health care provider and can adapt the exercises as needed.

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What are the exercise limitations for a person taking (your medications)?

The trainer should be able to tell you where she or he will find this information. A good sign is a trainer stating s/he will check with your health care provider.

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**What questions to ask****What answers to look for**

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**Education**

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What is your education?

An academic degree demonstrates a broad knowledge of exercise science, but a trainer who is self-taught and has multiple certifications can also have the same broad knowledge.

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Do you have a fitness certification?

Nationally-recognized certifications for personal trainers such as ACSM, ACE, NSCA and ASFA or a university certificate indicate a trainer has applied the broad knowledge of exercise science to the specifics of exercise program design.

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Have you had formal education about the physical changes that happen as people age?

Information about the aging process will be very helpful, regardless of your age. This could be college courses or workshops in gerontology or a certificate program in aging or senior fitness.

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Who is a resource you can talk with about my exercise program?

Look for an advisory board, colleagues or professors the trainer is in the habit of consulting with.

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Do you recommend a diet or supplements?

The answer should be "no" unless the trainer is also a registered dietitian. It's okay if the trainer recommends that you eat within the Food Guide Pyramid, but trainers are specialists in exercise, not in nutrition.

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**What questions to ask****What answers to look for**

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**Education**

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What will you do if I feel pain?

Muscle soreness is common when starting an exercise program. Pain is a sign that something is wrong and exercise should stop. Avoid trainers who say that you should "work through" pain.

What do you do to stay current about exercise and aging issues?

Does the trainer read journals, attend workshops and belong to professional organizations?

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**Personality**

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What do you expect from me as a client?

A trainer might expect you to try to do your best or to exercise a few days on your own or to arrive on time. It's always helpful to know expectations in advance.

What will we talk about during the training session?

You are trying to find out the trainer's "style." Will the trainer give you tips on healthy living? Ask about your day? Is s/he a drill sergeant who gives orders but doesn't chat? Any of these styles are all right as long as you are comfortable. (But gossiping about other clients or trainers is a bad sign.)

How will you make exercise interesting?

One good answer is "by changing the exercise program." A trainer who does the same exercises week after week is not a good choice.

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**What questions to ask****What answers to look for**

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**Personality**

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Add in your observations.

- Did the trainer listen to what you had to say?
- Does the trainer wear clothing and have a demeanor you are comfortable with?
- Do you like the person's personality and sense of humor?
- Can you spend a few hours a week with this person?

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**Business practices**

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Will you come to my house or do you only work at the gym?

If you want to exercise at home, the trainer will bring some equipment. Many trainers charge a little more to make house calls. If the trainer will come to your home, ask a family member or neighbor to come, too, for the first few visits while you evaluate the trainer.

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Will you give me written invoices?

You may need a record of your sessions and payments for your insurance company or physician or family.

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Do you offer services besides personal training?

Some trainers offer services like massage therapy or referrals to dietitians.

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## What questions to ask

## What answers to look for

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### Business practices

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What will the training sessions cost?

The average cost of a personal training session is \$50, although that will vary up or down depending on where you live. Most trainers offer a "package" of 10 sessions or 20 sessions, which reduces the cost. Trainers may also offer shorter 30-minute sessions or special sessions where you exercise with a friend and split the cost.

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How will you bill me?

Paying in advance for the sessions is the most frequent payment method.

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What is the cancellation policy if I want to stop training?

Since you are likely to pay in advance, find out exactly what the cancellation policy is. Remember if you are in a facility with more than one trainer you can easily try someone else.

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Can I have a few references from past clients?

A trainer should be able to provide a list of clients. It is appropriate for the trainer to want to check with clients first before giving you contact information. That protects clients' privacy.

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Do you have liability insurance?

Liability insurance is recommended by professional organizations and is a sign that the trainer is prepared.

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# ICAA Age-Friendly Personal Trainer Checklist



Look for a trainer who has a Yes beside most questions.

## EXPERIENCE

- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Does the trainer have at least two years of experience as a trainer?
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Does that include experience training clients my age?
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Will the exercise program be based on an individual assessment of my goals, abilities and health status?
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Has the trainer worked with people with my medical conditions?  
(eg, arthritis, diabetes or back pain)?
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Has the trainer worked before with a physical therapist or a physician?
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Does the trainer know about exercise limitations for the medications I take?

## EDUCATION

- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Does the trainer have education in exercise sciences and program design?
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Is there specific education in gerontology or the changes that occur as people age?
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Does the trainer have a personal training certification?
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Is there a resource (advisory board, professor, colleagues) the trainer uses to answer questions and generate ideas?
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Does the trainer feel that you should "work through" pain you feel during exercise?  
(The answer should be "no.")
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ Does the trainer recommend a diet or supplement?  
(The answer should be "no" unless the trainer is also a registered or licensed dietitian.)

## PERSONALITY

- Y\_\_ N\_\_ The trainer has told me what to expect from the sessions.
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ My time commitment, including days exercising on my own, is clear.
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ The trainer seems to have a sense of humor and personality that I like.
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ The trainer listened carefully to my questions and answered them.
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ The clothes, posture and verbal skills are a good match for me.
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ I think I can spend several hours a week with this trainer.

## BUSINESS PRACTICES

- Y\_\_ N\_\_ The trainer can work in my home (if applicable).
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ I will receive written invoices and records of my sessions for my family and insurance company.
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ The trainer offers other services I'm interested in, e.g., referral to a dietitian or massage therapy.
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ The costs of the session are clearly stated.
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ There is a cancellation policy I understand.
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ The trainer will give me references to past clients.
- Y\_\_ N\_\_ If coming to the house, the trainer is insured or bonded.





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