

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

Avoiding the Muscle Hustle: Tips for Buying Exercise Equipment

Looking for a way to keep fit, stay limber or lose weight? A diet of regular exercise can help.

Which exercise is best? The one you're really going to do. For some people, that means working out at home on exercise equipment.

If you're considering buying exercise equipment, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers this advice: Evaluate advertising claims for fitness products carefully. Exercise — with or without special equipment — is essential for good health. But be skeptical of claims that you will lose several pounds, inches or pant sizes in a short time (for example, “7 inches in 7 days” or “3 dress sizes in one month”). Even when combined with dietary supplements or specialized breathing techniques, it is virtually impossible for most consumers to achieve such major changes in appearance in a few days or weeks.

The FTC advises consumers to:

-  Ignore claims that an exercise machine or device can provide long-lasting, easy, “no-sweat” results in a short time. These claims are false: You can't get the benefits of exercise unless you exercise.
-  Question claims that a product can burn fat off a particular part of the body — for example, the buttocks, hips or stomach. Achieving a major change in your appearance requires sensible eating and regular exercise that works the whole body.
-  Read the ad's fine print. The advertised results may be based on more than just using a machine; they also may be based on restricting calories.
-  Be skeptical of testimonials and before-and-after pictures from “satisfied” customers. Their experiences may not be typical. Just because one person had success with the equipment doesn't mean you will, too.
-  Do the calculations when you read statements like “three easy payments of ...” or “only \$49.95 a month.” The advertised cost may not include shipping and handling fees, sales tax, and delivery and set-up fees. Find out the details before you order.
-  Get details on warranties, guarantees and return policies. A “30-day money-back guarantee” may not sound as good if you have to pay shipping on a bulky piece of equipment you want to “return to sender.”
-  Check out the company's customer and support services. Call the advertised toll-free numbers to get an idea of how easy it is to reach a company representative and how helpful he or she is.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive, and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.