# Alphabet Soup

## Selecting a Personal Trainer

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Okay, so you've taken the first step and decided to start that exercise program you've managed to put off forever. You've even decided to find a personal trainer — that miracle worker who will not only design a program, but also carefully observe your every move to keep you doing the right things the right way, all the while saying all the right things to keep you motivated to meet your goals.

But how do you know if you've found the trainer that best fits your specific needs? Given the choices today, selecting a trainer is like alphabet soup.

Personal trainers are both health and fitness professionals, who assess, motivate, educate and train clients on their fitness needs and how it all relates to their overall health. This involves designing safe and effective exercise programs to guide clients toward achieving their goals. Personal trainers are often "certified," which means the certificate holder has met the criteria established by the issuing agency or organization.

With the explosion of the fitness industry, there is no shortage of organizations or agencies that can provide a "certification" in some type of personal training. And although the term certification implies competency, the title following the trainer's name is not always an accurate assessment of their competency.

Some certification programs require a degree in a related field of study (for example, a Bachelors degree in kinesiology); others have little or no required formal course of study — just purchase the video and pass the computer test; and, still others may require participation in additional educational programs to stay current.

Securing accreditation from an unbiased and independent third-party agency, such as the National Commission for Certifying Agencies, is an excellent way to demonstrate an organization has met nationally recognized standards of operation. There are five associations that certify personal trainers that currently meet this criterion: American Council on Exercise, ACE; National Academy of Sports Medicine, NASM; National Council on Strength and Fitness, NCSF; National Federation of Professional Trainers, NFPT; and the National Strength and Conditioning Association, NSCA.

Still, what makes a trainer competent? For one thing, a trainer's experience should include work with people who are similar to you in age, physical condition, goals and workout availability. The role of stretching and warm-up, cardiovascular and resistance training, and training methods and equipment should be reviewed. Exercise selection, order, training volume, frequency, rest periods and any additional concerns should also be addressed. Your trainer must also be prepared to recognize emergency situations, and be able to act upon them, as well as point out even the slightest flaw in skill performance and how it should be corrected. Finally, your trainer should know his or her limits, and refer you to others when appropriate.

Before starting any exercise program, it is always best to check with your physician. Once you've been given the green light, ask questions and choose a trainer based on that trainer's qualifications. It may seem more strenuous than the exercises they prescribe, but selecting the right trainer is well worth the effort. Your trainer can be an excellent resource in helping you achieve your health and fitness goals.

Renker Wellness Center The Renker Wellness Center located on the Eisenhower Medical Center campus provides professional personal training services to its members for a minimal per-session fee. Trainers are certified not only by a qualifying national organization, but also in adult and senior fitness, cardiac/EKG interpretation and medication. Call the Renker Wellness Center at 760-773-2030 for more information.

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