

PT a-la-carte

If you're jack of getting nowhere with your exercise and eating, or falling off the wagon (again), a personal trainer may be just the ticket. Set yourself up for lifelong success by sorting the A-list PTs from the pretenders.

Words: Rebecca Long with Amelia Barnes

Lose the desperation

By the time you get around to Googling PTs (possibly followed by 'fit back into monochrome dress in four days'), chances are you're in panic mode. The muffin top needs to go – yesterday. But choosing a PT is a bit like choosing a car: it pays to do the groundwork. (No good getting a gas-guzzler if you have an hour commute.) This alone should eliminate a few contenders. "If you have a specific goal like wanting to run a marathon, lose 20 kilos or do bodybuilding, state this specifically and ask them what experience they have had getting clients to those goals," says PT-turned-health and fitness coach Nalisha Patel (nalishapatel.com).

These sites were made for stalking

Once you've got a shortlist, get your creepy stalker gear on and trawl for both the good

MENTIONS IN REPUTABLE MEDIA

{ ANATOMY OF A PT }

EXPERIENCE GETTING CLIENTS TO THOSE GOALS

CERTIFICATE IV IN FITNESS (PERSONAL TRAINING)

PUBLIC LIABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL INDEMNITY INSURANCE

START SEEING CHANGES TO YOUR MINDSET AND BODY QUICKLY



and the bad (a photo of her singing into a tequila bottle says as much as a glowing testimonial). Try LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and plain old Google. To keep your search focused (and save you from getting lost in random Facebook wedding albums), create a checklist of questions you have and take notes. This includes whether the online evidence trail matches claims made in their marketing. Patel suggests seeking out published articles citing their advice. Sydney-based master trainer Ricardo Riskalla also says mentions in reputable media (like, say, *WH&F*) are an indication that your prospective PT is proactive and knowledgeable. And don't feel weird about judging him or her on their abs/thighs/guns. Physique can say something about whether you're getting an obsessive drill sergeant who last ate bread in 1994, or a healthy role model. Once you've weeded out the no-gos, ask to speak to – or at least see unfiltered photos of – past and current clients. "Results speak much more than qualifications or experience, so be sure to only hire a trainer who can confidently show you photo and written testimonials," Patel says.

NCIS (credential investigation, sista!)

Most PTs have a Certificate IV in Fitness (personal training), which is about as ubiquitous as knockoff Celine t-shirts. According to Patel, who

has a double major bachelor of science in exercise science and psychology, ideally a trainer will have completed further competencies in human movement, exercise physiology or nutrition. She says trainers fit into three broad categories: basic (did a weekend course and have only had a handful of clients; PTing for less than a year), intermediate (did a university degree but have still less than three years of hands-on experience) and master trainer (worked for over three years with actual physical clients, has a degree or did a comprehensive course).

Another good preliminary check is whether your would-be PT is registered with Fitness Australia or Physical Activity Australia (fitness.org.au or physicalactivityaustralia.com.au); registration demands proof of regular professional development, so cowgirls are unlikely to list. You'll also want to size up their public liability and professional indemnity insurance.

Tricks and pranks

Here are pieces of the PT puzzle you won't find online. Getting voicemail is a good sign. While it may mean your fitness crush was out partying 'til 2am (or is hopelessly disorganised), a more likely scenario is that they're heavily booked. Empty restaurant principle. When you do get through, trust your gut. "Call your future trainer and follow your intuition. If something doesn't agree with you, let this person go," Riskalla says. And don't confine the convo to a checklist Q and A – this is the time to delve for peripheral information that can help you to form a complete picture. "What differentiates one PT from another is his or her head, not his or her biceps," says Riskalla. Scope out whether he or she's been hitting the books as well as the barbell. "A good trainer is intelligent, innovative and studies a lot."

Out on probation

The end of your search is just the beginning. Think of your first few weeks as probation (you're the boss, remember). Riskalla reckons you should have a fair idea of whether it's going to work within the first two weeks. If you don't start seeing changes to your mindset and body quickly, don't be afraid to call option two. Likewise if you're in agony. "Run from the so-called 'smash you' trainers that push you till you vomit," says Riskalla. "The idea of a good trainer is quality, and not his or her bullying ability."



All the credentials in the world can't overcome a clash between your motivation style and your PT's modus operandi. Consider Nalisha Patel's cheat sheet speed dating – fitness style.

TRADEMARK TRAIT: You crave change, get a rush from shopping (just look at your shoe closet!) and love new experiences.

TYPE: Impulsive.

PT MATCH: Choose a trainer who will keep you challenged and can offer you variety. Ask how often they will change your workout program and if they are experienced with various forms of exercise (weight training, Pilates moves, yoga moves, interval training, etc). The more forms they know, the more variety they can offer. Chat to them and make sure your personalities mesh.

TRADEMARK TRAIT: You love routine, have most likely been at the same job for years and are generally wary of trying new things.

TYPE: Stability seeker.

PT MATCH: Choose a trainer who can offer you a set plan each time. Express that you love to get a handle on a routine before it is changed. Ask them how often they change the workout program and ensure that each session will be similar in nature. Chat to them and make sure your personalities mesh.

TRADEMARK TRAIT: You love talking to others and enjoy doing things with others rather than alone.

TYPE: Social.

PT MATCH: Choose a trainer who matches your personality and age group. You will enjoy your sessions more if you can chat to them as a friend. Ask them why they love being a personal trainer. Use the conversation to check that they are right for you.

TRADEMARK TRAIT: You enjoy being on your own and do lots of research before you buy or do anything new.

TYPE: Independent.

PT MATCH: Choose a trainer who gives you the space to work out without constant chatter. Try a complimentary trial session with a few trainers to see who you mesh well with.

For a free downloadable gift pack including Patel's healthy snack ideas, visit lookforever30.com/FreeGift

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