

Better Business Bureau says losing weight is great but keep an eye on the bottom line

Written by

Tuesday, 14 January 2014 13:47



Many of us start the new year pledging to do things better. After weeks of holiday feasts and treats, getting in shape is generally one of the most common New Year's resolutions. The Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota (BBB) says while losing weight is always a laudable goal, it's also important to treat this decision like any other major purchase.

"Resolving to become more active is a great thing and there are many terrific health clubs to choose from," said Dana Badgerow, president and CEO of the BBB of Minnesota and North Dakota. "However, all contracts need to be reviewed closely and understood completely before an agreement is signed."

BBB recommends touring gyms or health clubs you're interested in joining and asking the following questions:

What are the terms of any introductory offers? Gyms and health clubs often use special introductory offers to attract new members. Just be sure you're clear on all the terms and what the monthly – or yearly – price will be once the introductory period is over.

Will my membership renew automatically? Many times people who join a gym fail to realize that their contract will renew automatically and that they have to take specific steps to cancel, such as providing a written cancellation notice anywhere from 30 to 60 days before the current contract expires.

Can I get out of my contract? Many contracts may not allow you to cancel before the term ends without an early termination fee. However, health clubs have different policies when it comes to how a move will affect your membership.

Whether or not you can be released from your contract might depend on how far away you're moving and if the club has other locations in the area of your new home.

What happens if your club goes out of business? Ask the sales representative to explain what will happen if they suddenly go out of business – or if they're purchased by another company.

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BBB suggests consumers consider the following factors, as well:

What are your fitness goals? Determining your fitness goals in advance will help you select the facility that best fits your needs. If you've been inactive for awhile or have a serious health condition, it's always a good idea to consult with a medical professional when setting your fitness goals.

Location, location, location! If your gym is across town, you'll be less likely to work out. Choose a fitness club that is convenient to your work or home so that location is not a deterrent to getting regular exercise.

Can you afford it? Monthly gym fees add up and after any introductory periods are over, the price could jump higher than your budget can handle. Be sure to do the math before you join and make sure you can afford a gym membership.

Be sure it's a fit for you: Don't give in to high-pressure sales tactics. A reputable gym will give you enough time to read the contract thoroughly, tour the facilities, and check out other options before making an informed decision.

Did you get everything in writing? Read the contract carefully and make sure that all verbal promises made by the salesperson are included. The terms of the contract are defined by the document you sign, so always be sure to get everything in writing!

Visit bbb.org to research the backgrounds of health clubs in your area.