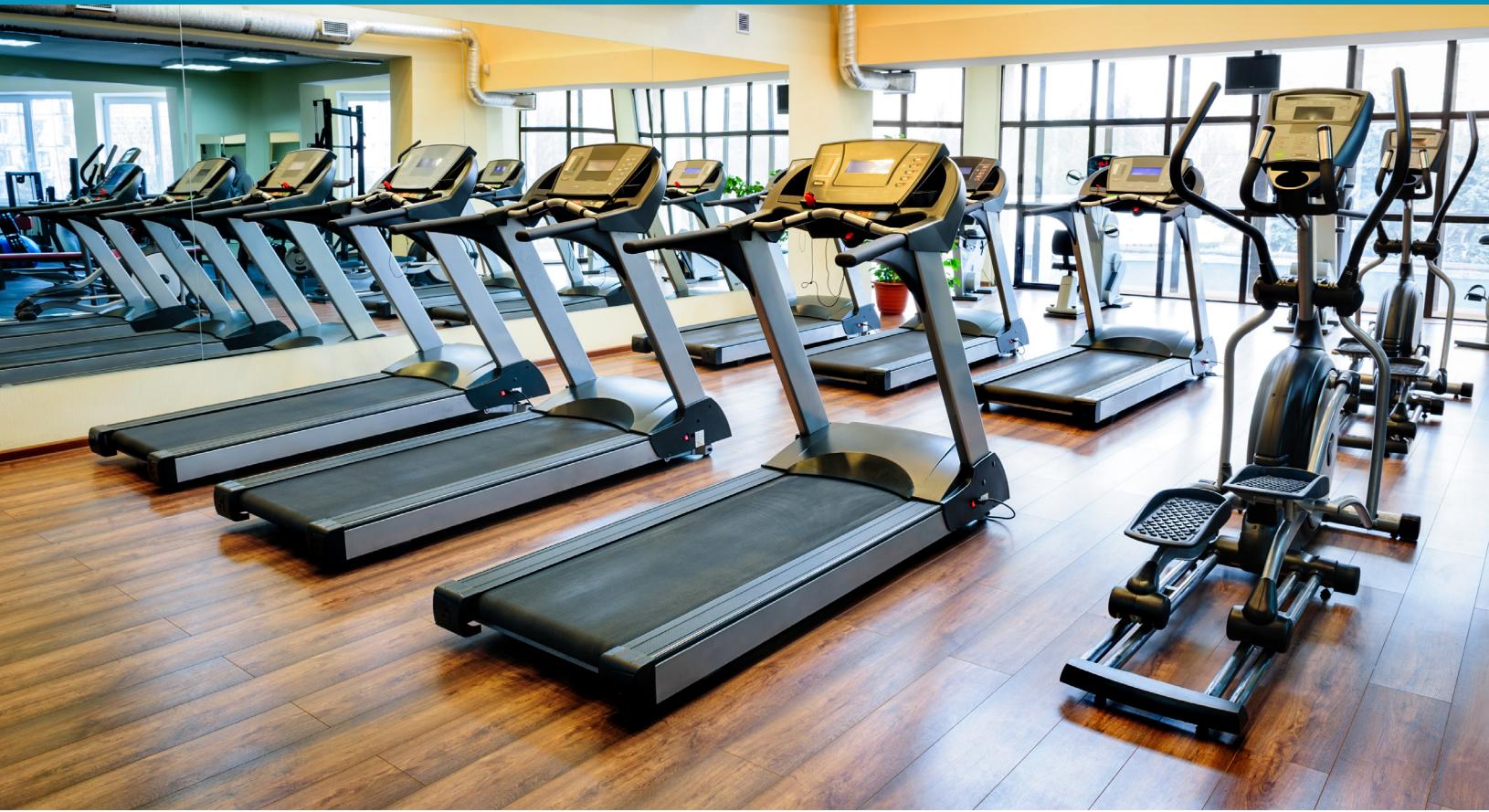


A Shopper's Guide to Exercise Equipment



Treadmills, stationary bikes, trampolines, rowing machines, and crosscountry ski simulators have been called dream machines because people sometimes expect belts, cogs, pulleys, and wheels to help make all their fitness dreams come true. And exercise equipment is a universal fixture in many homes as well as health clubs.

This “hardware for soft bodies” can provide a good workout. But you have to understand what the equipment is designed to do for you. A stationary bike, for instance, is good for burning calories, toning the lower body, and conditioning your heart. But it won’t tighten your abdominal muscles or strengthen your upper arms.

Once you've decided what type of apparatus you need, you can narrow the selection down to the best choice if you:

- Find out if the company who makes the equipment (and the dealer who sells it) is reputable.
- Talk to other people who own the model you're considering (or one like it).
- Decide if the price fits your budget.
- Test the equipment.
- Determine if it's easy to assemble, install, or move, and what maintenance it requires.
- Look for a reasonable warranty.
- Be sure the equipment will challenge you, so you don't “grow out of it” in a short time.