

# We Want to

The number of certified personal trainers has jumped 45 percent in just one year, reports *Working Woman*. Since there are just so many celebrities to go around, it follows that regular folks are making up the difference. Here's how to join the ranks of those sweating with the experts and what it's like if you do

by Vivien Santana Hughes

## Pump You Up



### True Confessions of a Personal Trainee

**D**ear Diary,

Tomorrow I will meet with a personal trainer named *Barbie*. What was I thinking?! I haven't worked out in ages (three years to be precise and even then I wasn't exactly a regular at the gym). I feel like I need to work out with a personal trainer *before* I can work out with a personal trainer.

All this because my editor assigned me to do this story.... Stop. Stop. All right, I'll come clean. I assigned *myself* this story because it moved. And any woman worth her tank top knows that *it* is that little bit of previously firm flesh now hanging from my upper arms. As visions of my great aunt Carmen in one of her sleeveless housedresses bounced in my head, I knew I had to act. Now.

#### The day

I talked myself into not being intimidated as I drove into the parking lot of Go Figure in Van Nuys. But the pep talk was unnecessary. Barbie was actually very nice, funny and kind to this mother of two (and not too unlike her plastic namesake, albeit taller).

I first filled out a detailed questionnaire on my medical history. Other mementos to keep in my workout book followed: My body fat percentage calculated with a fat caliper (that pinching gizmo), nine different measurements taken and duly noted (thighs included), a trip to the scale and—to top it off—a “before” photo.

Then we got to work: We started with 20 sets each of six variations on the sit-up. Yes, that equals 120 crunches.

There's something decadent, I decided, about having someone sitting next to you whose job it is to count how many reps you do. I liked it.

We then progressed to weights, concentrating on toning. She assured me that since my arms were thin (she pretended not to notice the jiggle) I'd notice muscle definition fairly quickly. For this first session she wanted to just get my muscles used to working again, she said, so she wouldn't press me too hard—a promise she kept, which I appreciated the next morning. The routine also alternated areas worked (back, chest, shoulders, arms, legs, back, etc.) so as not to overtire one group.

Last was a trip to the stair machine. “Weight training firms muscle,” says Barbie, who has a degree in physical education from Cal State

Northridge, but [cardiovascular exercise] builds up metabolism, burning more fat all day long.”

#### The following week

Reality check. Too cool to take notes, I could only remember one of the sit-up variations. I also realized I would never get to the gym three times a week and go to yoga class (something I had resumed on my own) a couple times as well.

No problem as far as Barbie was concerned. “Let's pretend none of these machines are here,” she said as she cheerfully revamped my entire workout to use only free weights and exercises—a routine I can accomplish in about half an hour. . . in my living room. She then told me exactly what I needed to get for home use and how much I should expect to pay: 30 to 50 cents per pound for hand weights. (Hint: if you need help carrying your 3- and 5-pound dumbbells to your car, then you really need to *use* your 3- and 5- pound dumbbells.)

One of the most enlightening aspects was writing down everything I ate (down to the last See's candy) for a week. There's nothing like seeing it in black and white to realize how deficient (fresh veggies) or overly abundant (sugar) your diet is in certain places—even if you're

not trying to lose weight. A good reason to have a personal trainer who is savvy about nutrition to advise you.

### And another week rolls by...

I'd been working out regularly for two full weeks now with a combination of weights and walking three times per week, yoga twice a week. Although I, and the majority of others, according to a recent survey, felt I didn't have enough time to exercise, I now find that by *making* time the rest of my day is far more productive.

One incident really sold me on this fitness stuff. I had a major work crisis: A full-on, cell-phone-to-the-ear-during-lunch-and-beyond kind of thing. By 4 o'clock, I'm reaching for the non-aspirin pain reliever, only then I realize, I don't have a headache. Usually at moments like this (and those not even close to this) the

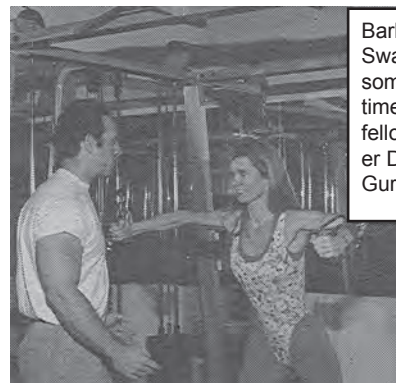
muscles at the back of my neck and shoulders progressively tense, causing an unmistakable and unceasing pounding pain across my forehead. Not now. Not at all. Oh, this is good....

### And yet another

A muscle popped up on my arm! Just like Barbie said: I am motivated now.

To keep me going I plan to schedule a training session every few months (more is ideal, of course, but I have to be realistic). Half-hour workouts are the most popular at Go Figure—you do the cardio on your own—where you'll pay from \$22.50 to \$30 each, depending on your payment schedule. At Forever Young in Northridge, a one-hour session is \$40, says long-time trainer Frank Cuva.

There's nothing like the personal touch, Cuva adds. "After you've paid your membership fee,



Barbie Swan takes some flex time with fellow trainer Drew Gurewitz.

a public gym doesn't care if you come back. A personal trainer hopes you'll show up every day."

To contact Barbie Swan at Go Figure, call (818) 786-3669. For Frank Cuva at Forever Young, call (818) 342-8909.



## How to Choose a Personal Trainer

If you're going to hire a fitness instructor, give your body and your bucks to one who is both qualified and right for you. The American Council on Exercise offers these tips.

### Certification is the first thing to look for

A personal trainer should be certified because that's your assurance you're working with someone who has the knowledge to provide you with a safe and effective workout. Not just any certification will do. You want a personal trainer who has been certified by a nationally recognized certifying organization, like the American Council on Exercise. Others include the Aerobics & Fitness Association of America (AFAA), the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), and the National Athletic Trainers Association Board of Certification.

Certification is more than a piece of paper. For example, to qualify for ACE certification, a personal trainer has to pass an intensive 3 1/2-hour, 175-question exam that covers exercise science and programming knowledge, including anatomy, kinesiology, health screening, basic nutrition and instructional methods. Ask prospective instructors what they were required to complete for certification.

### A checklist to help you hire the right person

After certification, there are a few other things you should take into consideration when hiring a personal trainer.

- ✓ **Ask for references**—specifically, the names and phone numbers of other clients with goals similar to yours. Call to see if they were pleased with their workouts, if the trainer was punctual and prepared, and if they felt their individual needs were addressed.
- ✓ **Make sure the trainer carries professional liability insurance.** Many personal trainers operate as independent contrac-

tors and are not employees of a fitness facility. Be sure you are covered in the event of an injury.

✓ **Be sure you understand the cancellation policy and billing procedure.** The best way to protect your rights and avoid confusion is to have those policies in writing.

✓ **Look for an instructor who is able to assist you with your special requirements.** A personal trainer should always have you fill out a health history questionnaire to determine your needs and limitations. If you have a medical condition or a past injury, he or she should design a session that takes these into account. If you're under a doctor's care, a personal trainer should discuss any exercise concerns with your doctor, and should ask for a health screening or release from your doctor.

✓ **Find out what the trainer charges.** Rates vary, depending on the trainer's experience, and the length and location of the workout session. For example, a personal trainer who works in a fitness club will probably charge less per hour than one who works independently and needs to come to your home or office.

✓ **Decide if this is someone you can work with.** Some people like to exercise in the morning, some in the evening. Will the instructor you're talking to accommodate your schedule? What about the trainer's gender? Some people do better with a trainer of the same sex; others prefer the opposite sex. The personal trainer you select should motivate you by positive, not negative, reinforcement. Even more important, that trainer should be someone you like. Ask yourself if you think you could get along well with this person. Ask yourself, too, if you think the trainer is genuinely interested in helping you. The personal trainer who best measures up is the one to hire. And that's the professional who will help you get the best results.

