



GET UP TO SPEED How well a treadmill maintains speed while in use was included in our battery of tests.

Exercise equipment

Tests of 40 machines include 6 CR Best Buys

THINKING ABOUT CANCELING that gym membership and working out at home? You're not alone. Industry analysts say that gym memberships peaked at 42.7 million in 2006, have slipped slightly since, and are expected by some to decline further in these recessionary times. But sales of home exercise equipment, including treadmills, elliptical exercisers and stationary bikes, have continued to grow in recent years.

We trotted, plodded, and pedaled on 40 machines including treadmills, elliptical exercisers, and stationary bikes, testing for exercise range, ergonomics, construction, safety, and more. Prices

range from about \$200 to \$3,300. The pricier machines generally have sturdier designs and more features, but there are bargains that can offer a good workout.

"The top one is the one you enjoy because if you enjoy it, you'll use it more frequently," says Christina A. Geithner, a professor of exercise science at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash.

That's helpful information, considering that 37 percent of CONSUMER REPORTS subscribers used their machines less frequently than they expected, according to a survey in 2007 by the Consumer Reports National Research Center.

Treadmills are the most popular, com-

manding about 55 percent of the home-fitness-equipment market. Running is the gold standard for cardiorespiratory fitness, but elliptical exercisers and stationary bikes might help strengthen your legs, hips, and glutes more than running because you can ramp up the resistance to work your muscles harder.

A workout on an elliptical exerciser is a good choice for those with joint problems or extra weight. Those machines can also help you improve balance. And they have one advantage that most treadmills don't offer: the ability to work out in reverse, which stimulates the muscles differently, Geithner says.

There are two kinds of stationary bikes. The traditional upright type resembles a regular bicycle; a recumbent bike has back support. They provide similar workouts, though Geithner says an upright might work your glutes better because you can fully extend your hips. Because body weight is supported, both types are options for people who have difficulty with balance or have lower-limb injuries. A recumbent might be more comfortable for those with back problems.

How to choose

To find the right machine for you, be sure to try before you buy. Consider these factors:

Check your space. Elliptical exercisers and nonfolding treadmills are about the size of a small couch, and most stationary bikes are a bit smaller. Folding treadmills are generally shorter than nonfolding models, and they can be stored upright to save space. Elliptical exercisers take up more vertical space, so be careful if you have low ceilings.

Make it comfortable. For treadmills, consider your stride. If you have a long stride or you plan to run, a longer deck might be necessary. Less expensive folding treadmills can have shorter decks.

Pay special attention to ergonomics when choosing an elliptical. You should never feel discomfort in your knee or hip joints, and your knees shouldn't bump the frame or handgrips. Two models, the SportsArt E83 and the ProForm XP 420 Razor, have adjustable stride lengths, which might make them better for multiple users. The SportsArt is easy to adjust to six settings; the ProForm has only two settings and is more difficult to adjust.

Stationary bikes vary in size and shape. When you're shopping for one, adjust it for your size in the store. Look for a com-

fortable seat and pedals that fit your feet. We found a few ergonomic and comfort quibbles with some bikes. The Gold's Gym Power 210 U seat can adjust for users up to 6 feet 2 inches, but we found that anyone over about 5 feet 8 inches hit their knees on the handlebars. The Omega Fitness CO-BU130 had handlebars that were a long reach for some. And all of our panelists

found the seat on the HealthRider ExerPlay 200 uncomfortable.

Watch the warranties. Look for one that provides at least two to three years of coverage on major moving parts and a year for labor. Survey data on the probability of failure and repair costs showed that extended warranties are probably not a good deal.

Continued on page 36

Overview

Treadmills, which command about 55 percent of the home-fitness market, are the most popular home machines. They're a good source of cardiorespiratory exercise.

✓ CR Best Buy

These models offer the best combination of performance and price. All are recommended.

✓ Recommended

These are all high-performing models that stand out for reasons listed below.

Best value:

- B1 Bowflex** \$1,500
- B3 Epic View** \$1,300 **CR Best Buy**
- B7 Sole** \$1,000 **CR Best Buy**

B1 has an easily readable display and a 60-inch-long deck that can accommodate most runners. **B3** has an LCD television contained in the console. Its 57-inch-long deck is good for most runners. **B7** is a folding model with a well-planned console and a 56-inch-long deck.

Best for avid runners:

- A1 Landice** \$3,300
- A3 SportsArt** \$2,700
- A4 PaceMaster** \$2,000 **CR Best Buy**

A1 has a reading shelf that doesn't block the display and controls. **A3** has adjustable cushioning. **A4** is the best value and has a negative incline.

Budget models, good for walking:

- B10 Proform** \$500
- B13 Gold's Gym** \$650

Both are smaller-length machines, which should be good for most walkers.

Unique design

- B14 LifeSpan** \$1,400

This compact folding treadmill is our smallest recommended model and might fit into smaller spaces.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is based on ease of use, ergonomics, exercise range, and construction. **Motor, hp** is the manufacturer's continuous horsepower rating. **Belt** shows the usable exercise surface. **Ease of use** is how easy it is to adjust exercise levels, read the display, and operate program functions. **Ergonomics** is how the treadmill accommodates different users, how easy it is to exercise and to get on and off the machine. **Construction** describes our determination of quality and our durability test results. **Exercise range** tells how well each machine provides an effective workout for a range of users. **Safety** includes stop-button size and location, safety-key operation, the probability of striking the motor housing, and security of the deck when folded. **Price** is approximate retail.



A4 PaceMaster

B3 Epic View

B7 Sole

Ratings Treadmills

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A and B.)

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Motor, hp	Belt (LxW, in.)	Overall score	Test results				
							Ease of use	Ergonomics	Construction	Exercise range	Safety

A NONFOLDING Most have longer decks, which can be better for running.

✓	1	Landice L7 Cardio Trainer	\$3,300	4	58x20	87	●	●	●	●	●	●
	2	Precor 9.31	3,300	3	57x22	85	○	●	●	●	●	●
✓	3	SportsArt TR32	2,700	3	60x22	83	○	●	●	●	●	●
✓	4	PaceMaster Platinum Pro VR	2,000	3	57x20	82	○	●	○	●	○	●
	5	True PS300	2,400	3	60x21	81	○	●	○	●	●	●
	6	Smooth Fitness 9.35HR	2,400	3	51x20	76	○	●	○	○	●	●
	7	Nautilus Sport Series T518	3,300	3	62x20	75	○	●	○	●	●	●
	8	Bodyguard T240P	2,500	3	60x20	75	○	●	○	●	●	●

B FOLDING Better for compact spaces.

✓	1	Bowflex 7-Series	1,500	3	60x20	83	○	●	●	●	●	●
	2	SportsArt TR21f	2,500	3	58x20	82	○	●	○	●	●	●
✓	3	Epic View 550	1,300	4	57x20	81	○	●	○	●	●	●
	4	Smooth 6.45M	1,700	3	59x20	78	○	●	○	○	○	opt.
	5	Spirit XT475	2,200	4	53x20	77	○	●	○	○	○	●
	6	Life Fitness F3 (Advanced)	2,800	3	55x20	76	○	●	○	○	○	●
✓	7	Sole F63	1,000	3	56x20	73	○	●	○	○	○	●
	8	PaceMaster Gold Elite	2,500	3	57x20	71	○	●	○	○	○	●
	9	NordicTrack A2550	1,600	3	53x22	70	○	○	○	○	○	opt.
✓	10	Proform Crosswalk 580	500	2	54x20	70	○	○	○	○	○	●
	11	Horizon Fitness T1200	1,200	3	52x19	69	○	○	○	○	○	○
	12	BH T2 Pro	1,600	3	55x20	68	○	○	○	○	○	○
✓	13	Gold's Gym Maxx Crosswalk 650	650	2	54x20	68	○	○	○	○	○	○
✓	14	LifeSpan TR2000	1,400	3	53x19	65	○	○	○	○	○	○
	15	LifeSpan TR1000-HRC	1,000	2	54x20	61	○	○	○	○	○	○



1 Diamondback



3 LifeCore Fitness

Ratings Elliptical exercisers

In performance order.

CR Best Buy Recommended

- Excellent
- ◐ Very good
- Good
- ◑ Fair
- Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results							Chest-strap included	Standard power supply	
					Ergonomics	Exercise range	Ease of use	Construction	Heart-rate monitor	Safety				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Diamondback I260 Ef	\$2,600	83	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	AC
	2	SportsArt E83	2,600	68	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	AC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	3	LifeCore Fitness LC985VG	1,100	65	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	AC
	4	Tunturi CF35	1,700	63	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	AC
	5	Kettler CT 307 Verso	600	55	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	AC
	6	Gold's Gym 510	540	52	●	●	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	battery
	7	Proform XP 420 Razor	350	45	●	●	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	battery
	8	Body-Solid Endurance E4	900	44	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	battery

Overview

Workouts on an elliptical exerciser approach the cardio levels you can reach on a treadmill and are better for those with joint problems.

Best overall:

- 1 **Diamondback** \$2,600
- 3 **LifeCore Fitness** \$1,100 **CR Best Buy**

1 has an adjustable incline and a broad selection of heart-rate-monitoring programs. 3 has a dial for adjusting resistance and selecting programs.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is based on ergonomics, exercise range, and ease of use, along with construction, heart-rate monitoring, and safety. **Ergonomics** indicates how well a machine accommodates people of various sizes. **Exercise range** measures effort required to propel a machine through its range of resistance-level settings. **Ease of use** indicates how easy it is to adjust exercise levels, use programs, and read the monitor. **Construction** is a measure of quality and our perception of operating noise, feel, ride, and stability. **Heart-rate monitor** evaluates the standard heart-rate sensors, programs, and how heart rate controls elliptical operation. **Safety** is an indication of the stability of the machine, pedal geometry, and pedal materials. **Price** is approximate retail.



A1 Spirit



B1 Schwinn

Ratings Stationary bikes

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A and B.)

CR Best Buy Recommended

- Excellent
- ◐ Very good
- Good
- ◑ Fair
- Poor

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Fits users		Overall score	Test results							Chest-strap heart-rate monitor			
				User height range, in.	Maximum user weight, lb.		Ergonomics	Exercise range	Ease of use	Construction	Heart-rate monitor	Safety					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Spirit XBR25	\$1,200	58 to 79	350	90	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	2	Lifecycle R3	2,000	58 to 80	400	86	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	3	SportsArt C520R	2,000	59 to 84	330	85	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	4	LifeCore Fitness 900RB	1,000	63 to 80	300	81	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	5	Schwinn 231	550	57 to 81	300	78	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
A RECUMBENT Has back support.																	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1	Schwinn 130	350	62 to 77	300	75	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	2	Omega Fitness CO-BU130	400	57 to 69	300	62	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
	3	HealthRider ExerPlay 200	350	63 to 74	250	42	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	4	Gold's Gym Power 210 U	200	61 to 68	250	40	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Overview

With stationary bikes, you generally get what you pay for. More expensive machines have higher quality and come with a chest-strap heart-rate monitor, but less-expensive models can still offer a good workout. Spending more usually buys you a longer warranty.

Best value:

- A1 **Spirit** \$1,200 **CR Best Buy**
- B1 **Schwinn** \$350

A1 and B1 have detailed displays, but the screens are blocked when using the book rest. A1 has a low step-through design that fits a wide range of users and includes a chest-strap heart-rate monitor. B1 has easy-to-use programs but has only a contact heart-rate monitor on the handles.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is based mainly on ergonomics but also considers exercise range, ease of use, construction, and safety. Under **fits users**, height is our estimate; weight is specified by the manufacturer. **Ergonomics** is how well the bike accommodates the user's movements. **Exercise range** is how well each machine conforms to users of various fitness levels. **Ease of use** is how simple it is to adjust exercise levels, use the programs, and read the monitor. **Construction** includes pedaling smoothness, quietness, and stability. **Heart-rate monitor** assesses that feature and whether it includes heart-rate computer programs. **Safety** assesses pinch points, resistance to tipping, and tripping hazards. **Price** is approximate retail.

Continued from page 34

Features that count

Display. Look for a clear display with easy-to-use controls. A good one will show some combination of your heart rate, calories burned, speed, and incline or resistance levels, and details such as time and distance.

Programming. Look for machines with programs that allow you to adjust routines based on your fitness level and have heart-rate-controlled workouts that consider your age, weight, and gender.

Heart-rate monitor. Those with a chest strap are best; they don't impede your movement. Contact monitors measure your heart rate only when you're touching them, which can be inconvenient. Stand-alone heart-rate monitors are available for about \$28 to \$100. (See Ratings at right.)

Resistance. Look for a machine that is easy to adjust and has a variety of workout levels. Treadmills offer a range of speeds and inclines. Some can simulate running or walking downhill. Most elliptical exercisers have electronic resistance control. The Body-Solid Endurance E4 had a mechanical control that worked poorly. Resistance on the tested bikes can be adjusted electronically by using the controls.

Features. Decide which extra features are important to you. There are treadmills with an LCD TV or adjustable deck cushioning, a stationary bike with video games, and an elliptical with an adjustable incline, offering a step-climbing-style workout. But many panelists found drawbacks in the lack of simple niceties, such as a book rest or a place for your water bottle.

Safety

All of these machines have many moving parts and can be hazardous, so follow directions. Hospital-treated treadmill injuries have risen an estimated 62 percent from 2000 to 2006. And the greatest percentage of injuries has been among toddlers, who were hurt while a parent using the machine didn't see the child playing behind or beneath it. One type of serious injury occurs when a hand gets caught on or under the moving belt, causing severe burns or lacerations.

What you can do. Make sure that equipment is locked and out of children's reach, and keep young children away from equipment without safety locks. Make sure children are kept away from exercise equipment while it is in use.

Pedometers and heart-rate monitors

Wherever you work out, pedometers and heart-rate monitors can help you step it up.

Heart-rate monitors. Vigorous exercise can lead to even more extensive health benefits, and a heart-rate monitor can help you track the intensity of your workout. Most include a chest strap and a wristwatch, but two were wristwatches only, and one was a ring that measures your pulse.

The **A1 Timex** was our top performer, but

all except the **C1 LifeSpan** will provide a consistently accurate heart-rate reading. The chest-strap monitors allow you to move freely. The wrist monitors don't provide a continuous reading, and we don't recommend them for cyclists because you'd have to let go of the handlebars to touch the monitor for a reading. The **A1 Timex** has a heart-rate-recovery feature that measures how quickly your heart rate returns to

Ratings Heart-rate monitors

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A, B & C.)

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results	
					Accuracy	Ease of use
				0 100		
				P F G V G E		

A CHEST STRAP Allows you to move freely.

1	Timex Personal Trainer 5G971	\$55	93	●	●
2	Acumen EON Basix Plus	50	92	●	●
3	Omron HR-100 C	45	86	●	●
4	Reebok RS-1 D	50	82	●	●
5	Polar FS1	60	73	●	●

B WRIST Must touch device to get reading.

1	Sportline Solo 960*	100	84	●	●
2	Mio Select Classic	50	78	●	○

C FINGER Convenient but less accurate.

1	LifeSpan My Beat Heart Rate Ring	28	53	○	○
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D Model has been discontinued but may still be available in stores.



A1 Timex



A2 Acumen



B1 Sportline

Ratings Pedometers

CR Best Buy

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

In performance order, within types. (Types designated A and B.)

Recommendation	Rank	Brand & model	Price	Overall score	Test results			Features		
					Accuracy	Ease of use	Features	Counts steps	Measures distance	Calculates speed
				0 100						
				P F G V G E						

A STEP & DISTANCE COUNTERS Worn in pocket or on waistband.

✓	1	Omron HJ-112	\$30	85	●	●	○	●	●
	2	Accusplit AE190XLG	35	73	●	●	○	●	●
	3	New Lifestyles NL-2000 Activity	60	71	●	●	○	●	●
	4	Sportline Solo 960*	100	65	●	○	●	●	●
	5	Sportline ThinQ Pocket 303	30	64	●	○	●	●	●
	6	Freestyle Tracer 59302	25	63	●	●	●	●	●

B SPEED & DISTANCE MONITORS (GPS) Worn on wrist.

	1	Garmin Forerunner 205	180	85	●	○	●	●	●
	2	Timex Ironman 5E701	200	69	●	●	●	●	●

* This is a combination pedometer and heart-rate monitor.

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normal. The **B1 Sportline** also has a built-in pedometer.

Pedometers. Even moderate activities such as walking briskly can help you stay healthy. Use a pedometer to monitor your activity. The step-and-distance type detects movement to count your strides. Most attach to the user's waistband, though some can be worn in a pocket. The speed-and-distance monitors we tested are worn on the wrist and use GPS monitoring to calculate total speed and distance.

The top-scoring **A1 Omron** was the only model that scored Excellent for accuracy at both low and high speeds. For outdoor activities consider a GPS speed-and-distance device, but both models we tested lost satellite connections a few times. Some of our panelists found the **A2 Accusplit** uncomfortable. The pocket-only model, **A5 Sportline**, was less accurate when worn in loose clothing. Most include step-counting, distance, and calories. One step-counter, the **A4 Sportline**, has a built-in heart-rate monitor. The **B1 Garmin** has programming that allows you to download and manage your workouts on your computer. The **B2 Timex** has speed and distance alerts.

Guide to the Ratings

Overall score is based mainly on accuracy but also on ease of use. **Accuracy** was measured against a highly accurate electrocardiograph. The higher the accuracy score, the more often the monitor came within five beats per minute of our reference. **Ease of use** covers the features on the monitor, the clarity of instructions, and panelists' judgments of convenience. **Price** is approximate retail.



A1 Omron

B1 Garmin

Guide to the Ratings

Most of the pedometers display steps, distance, and calories. The speed-and-distance monitors display pace or speed, and distance. Two of the three are GPS-enabled. **Overall score** is based mainly on accuracy; ease of use and features are also considered. **Accuracy** is how close the pedometer or speed-and-distance monitor reading was to our control. **Ease of use** rates facility of understanding instructions and whether the panelists would purchase the device. **Features** includes steps, calories, distance, stopwatch, multiline display, position of display, water resistance, and more. **Price** is approximate retail.

Phil Millner is a retired engineer and lifelong Manhattan resident. "I trust *Consumer Reports* completely for their technical expertise and integrity. I'm happy to support their mission." *The Smart Consumer Gift Annuity*® appealed to Phil's philanthropic nature and offered real financial benefits – which is why his generosity and trust has led to multiple gifts.



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age	rate
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