

CHILD CARE

Sit-up sitters

CONSIDERING YOUR GYM'S on-site day-care? Here are some guidelines:

- Safety first. Look for clutter-free play areas, skid-proof rugs, and childproof electrical sockets.
- No wander, no cry. There should always be a gate or shut door separating the children from the rest of the gym.
- Make sure the caregiver knows you well enough to pick you out of a busy aerobics class if your child needs you.
- Ask if your health club requires the on-site professional to know child CPR and first aid.
- One caregiver should be available for every four children under 3 years of age, while one is appropriate for every eight children between 3 and 5.
- Look for a fun play space with lots of toys and games. Your child may even get his or her own playing "workout." —Cheryl Fenton



Make a visit to the gym child's play.



Watch this Ever wonder just how cold it is when you begin to see your breath? Nike's Ambient Frozen Watch (\$89) has a temperature sensor that lets you know. With analog display, timer, and date.

FITNESS

Stretch marks

Finally, some guidelines on stretching, thanks to a study in a recent issue of *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*. Take our quiz and see if you need to revise your regimen.

—Tracy Teare

TRUE OR FALSE?

1 You should hold each stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.

True. One stretch of 15 to 30 seconds per muscle group works for most. However, you may need to repeat stretches, or hold them longer. Here's how to get the right amount, says Ian Shrier, M.D., a lead researcher of this study: Stretch to the point where you feel tension (not discomfort). Hold until the tension eases, then increase the stretch until you begin to feel tension again. Hold until tension once again dissipates.

2 Stretching increases range of motion and eases pain and stiffness.

True.

3 Stretching before you exercise prevents you from pulling a muscle.

False. Contrary to popular belief, stretching before a workout will not thwart injury, but it will increase range of motion.

4 If time is critical, warm up, but skip the stretching before you walk.

True. Warming up before exercise prevents injury, and is therefore essential. A warm-up and stretch combo is best for sports that require a big range of motion, such as tennis, dance, or cross-country skiing. But for walking, running, and cycling, it's fine to save stretching for post-workout.

5 Ballistic stretching—in which you bounce up and down—is the best method.

True. Research shows that static stretching—where you gently stretch and hold—is as effective as ballistic, but probably safer.



It's not a reach to say stretching feels great.

6 It's best to warm up muscles before you stretch.

True. Your range of motion will improve more if you've warmed up your muscles first. Applying heat helps, but at least 5 to 10 minutes of moderate activity is best.