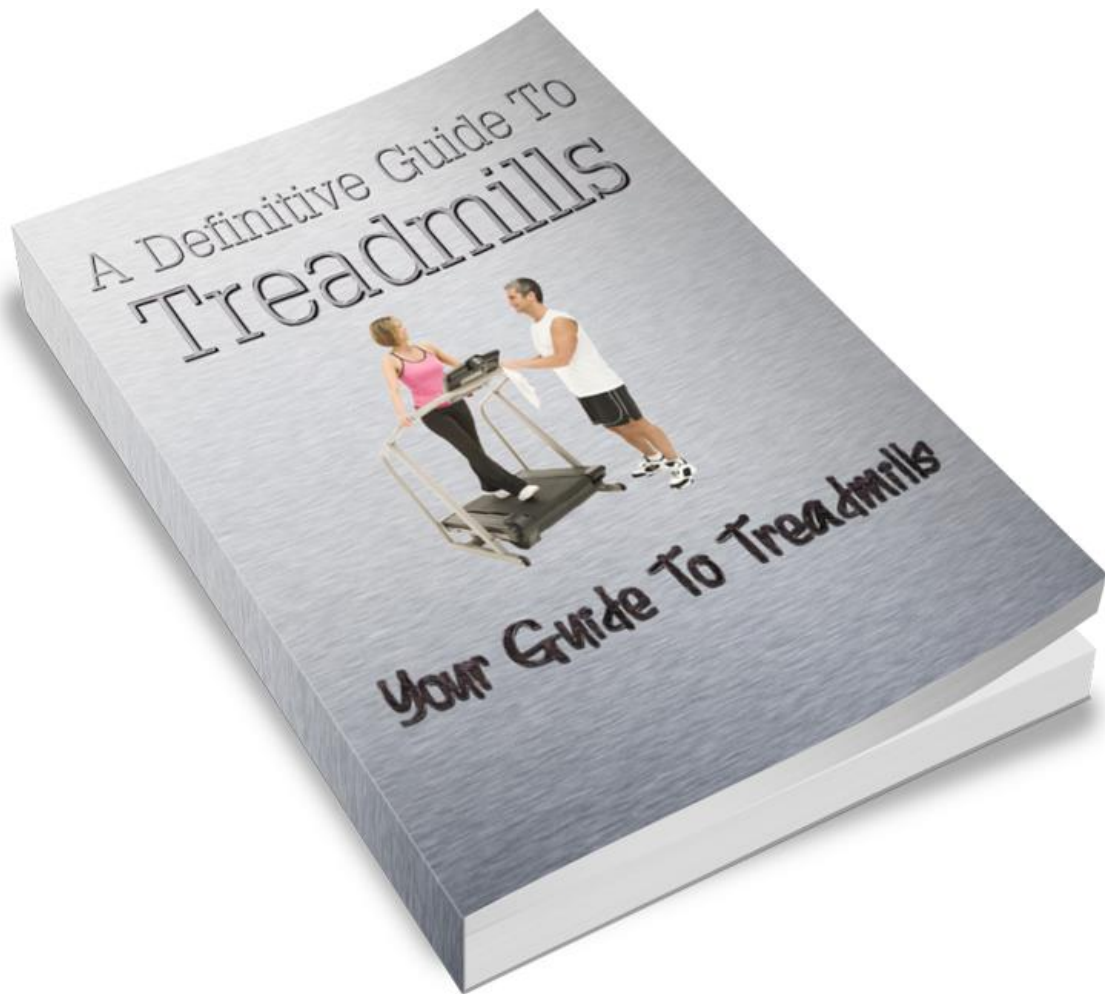


## **A Definitive Guide To Treadmills**



## **5 Facts About Treadmills**

### **Where does fitness begin?**

The gym is one of the most common places to exercise and stay fit. After all, this is where all the exercise equipment – treadmills, weights, lifting equipment – can be found. But it takes too much time going to the gym every day or every other day. It's inconvenient. Plus, you have to make these hassling monthly membership payments just so you could keep coming.

But, what if you could dispense with all that? What if you bought your own equipment and exercised at home?

The treadmill is the best exercise equipment you can buy for home use. It's fairly easy to use and fairly easy to buy. Not only that, but for most people, running is the best type of exercise. It develops the muscles of your legs, improves cardiac-respiratory endurance, keeps your blood running, and burns down calories. The treadmill is an excellent choice of equipment in lieu of actually running outside. You can run even in bad weather – whether it's snowing, raining when the ground is too muddy for much running, or even whether it's too hot. The treadmill can also be recommended to all types of exercise enthusiasts, regardless of sex and age.

So now that you know what makes the treadmill excellent for home exercise, let's go down to the facts. The number question we all probably have once confronted with buying a treadmill is, “How much is it worth?”

### **Fact #1 -- The Price of Fitness**

Treadmills can cost a good deal of money, so it is important that you consider your budget before you buy. It is also equally important that you buy the highest quality machine that you can find, which is of course only common sense. The smart buyer will always want to get the most of his money. And so do you.

A decent treadmill probably wouldn't take too much from your wallet. Plan on spending at least \$1,000. Believe me, that isn't a lot compared to other home exercise equipment that people keep in their houses. If you want better than decent, try adding some \$300 or \$500 in there. There are some pretty good models that fall under that price range, but remember that cheap treadmills are often worth exactly like what their price dictates.

There are four factors involved when you buy a treadmill. These are:

- How much money you have
- Any extras you want (programming, heart rate, monitor, etc.)
- What kind of motor you want; and
- How much space you have in your house

By answering all these questions, you should have some basic idea on which among the treadmills available in your best buy.

## **Fact #2 – The Motor Factor**

Before we start, let's get down to the basic first. A typical treadmill is comprised of seven main components. These are:

- The frame – which is that piece of metal that extends perpendicularly from the running deck and is where the handlebars are located
- The running deck – which is the surface that you run on
- The running belt – the moving portion of the running deck
- The motor – the engine that makes the running belt
- The motor controller – the gadget that allows you to control the speed of the motor
- The incline motor – a tiny motor that controls the degree of inclination as you run
- The console and control computer – that part of the treadmill which makes you do all the other stuff

Out of these seven components, the most important is obviously the motor, because it's what makes your treadmill work in the first place. For this reason, you need to consider the motor first when you buy a treadmill.

As mentioned, most treadmills have two motors – one to drive the belt and the other to raise and lower the bed for inclines. When you look over a few treadmills as you shop, choose one with a continuous duty belt motor with at least 1.5 horsepower. 1.5 horsepower is the average, but remember that more horsepower doesn't necessarily mean better. This is particularly true if the motor is not continuous duty. So, when the salesperson tells you that 'maximum power' is what's it all about, don't be fooled. You know better. Get the treadmill with the continuous duty motor.

Here are some other terms you need to familiarize yourself with as you shop around for the best treadmill:

- Fixed Speed Alternating Current (AC) Motors – while motor runs at a constant speed, it uses a transmission to regulate the speed of the treadmill
- Direct Current (DC) Motors – directly regulates speed, using variable voltage and not a transmission; this means that the motor itself changes speeds as the user makes adjustments
- Variable Speed AC Motors – also regulates speed directly and connects directly to the drive belt
- Peak Horsepower – the maximum horsepower a motor is capable of reaching before stalling out
- Continuous horsepower – the actual horsepower being used when someone is using the treadmill

### **Fact #3 – Other Specifications**

Of course, it goes without saying that aside from the motor, there are also other things you need to look for in a treadmill. That is what makes a treadmill so great – every component is equally important and should be chosen with the utmost care if you want what's worth for your money.

Most people use the treadmill for running. Others may prefer walking on it, but majority really buy treadmills because they don't want the hassle of having to go

outside for a quick jog every morning or evening. For that, you need a lot of flat surface. Your treadmill comes equipped with a rolling belt on which you will do your running. The suggested belt size should be at least 48 inches long and 16 inches wide. Look for a treadmill with those kinds of specifications and I guarantee you that you won't regret it one bit.

If you plan on running, get a treadmill that goes up to 10 mph. For incline, get a treadmill that can go up to 10%. Some people say that an incline of 20% is the best choice, but really, that's too much. Ten percent is exactly what you need, not too much, not too less.

Cushioning is another thing you should watch out for. Sprains happen when you run because you were wearing the wrong shoes or the ground wasn't conducive to running, i.e. there wasn't enough cushioning to support each foot-strike. When you buy a treadmill, choose one with a running bed that could absorb shock. Also, make sure that the bed doesn't move around with every foot-strike.

Check the frames. Make sure that they provide you with stability. The treadmill should shake or move around when you run or walk on it. A good tip would be to try standing on the treadmill and hold on to the handlebars, assuming your position when you run. If the frame feels like it isn't solidly placed, don't buy that treadmill. Move on to the next one.

The control panel of your treadmill is the fun part. This is where you control every other aspect of your treadmill, besides the motor (and sometimes even that). Most treadmill models these days come with their very own exercise programs and let you choose which among the beginners, advanced, and expert programs you want to try. Other treadmills have their own personal electronic trainer installed in their programming and you can access that through your treadmill's control panel.

When looking at control panels, it is important that it should be within easy reach from where you will be as you run. It is important that it be simple to use as well. Remember that your control panel is your one access to your treadmill because it where you can control everything with just a touch of a button or a twist of a knob.

#### **Fact #4 – Making the Decision**

There are many types of treadmills for many types of individuals. There are treadmills with personal trainers installed in them. There are treadmills that purely traditional in the sense that they don't have a single program running them. There are treadmills with maximum horsepower. There are treadmills with low power. So before you buy, try to decide what you want. Use the questions below as a guide in arriving at a decision:

- Do you want running or walking programs included?
- Do you need a heartrate monitor?
- Do you want a function that lets you hook your treadmill up to a website such as ifit.com for new workouts?
- Do you need a treadmill that folds (usually more expensive) or do you have enough space to house a treadmill full time?
- How easy is the treadmill to maintain?

Once you have all that down, then you should be ready to the next step, which is

## **Fact #5 – Trying it Out**

Perhaps the most important step to buying a treadmill, trying one out before actually buying is only logical. After all, those spec sheets they show you are only figures, numbers, technical descriptions. You won't know for sure until you try it or hold it in your two hands.

Make a list of all treadmill models you like and call sporting goods stores to see if they're available locally. Spend at least 10 minutes on each treadmill, making sure that it runs quietly and doesn't shake even when you're running on it. And while you're there, see where the drink holder is, a place where you can place your walkman, a book rack, and some other small stuff that aren't terribly important but would be a nice addition anyway. And after checking all those out and coming up with your hands full, make the purchase and bring your new treadmill home.

## **How to Keep your Treadmill Running**

Buying a treadmill is hard enough. Choosing the best out of many treadmills in the market is nigh impossible. But once you've got the treadmill you've always wanted, are your worries truly over? Well, they certainly are, but only if you maintain your treadmill properly.

Your treadmill is probably the most expensive fitness investment you've ever made. It's only natural therefore if you want to prolong its life. One of the ways to doing that is to keep a regular maintenance schedule.

A quality treadmill, however, should not require frequent maintenance schedule. Upkeep for your treadmill includes period dusting, and, if need be, occasional belt lubrication. The following are some tips to help you maintain your treadmill and prolong the life of your fitness investment.



## **Keep it Clean and Dust-free**

The number one cause of premature belt failure is dirt. That has always been the case ever since the first treadmill was sold in the fitness equipment market. And the number one way of avoiding dust from totally ruining your precious treadmill is to adopt a cleaning routine of sorts.

Dusting between the belt and deck at least once a week will ensure longevity of the machine. The deck should be kept dry and debris-free at all times. In addition, make sure the area where you place your treadmill is relatively dust-free, to minimize the dust from getting between the belt and/or the deck.

Apply the following cleaning procedure once a week or as needed:

- Wipe down display with a mild solution of Non-Phosphate cleaner on damp soft cotton. Cloth should be damp not wet.
- Wipe down handrails and traction strips with soft cotton cloth and mild soap and water. Cloth should be damp not wet.
- Vacuum or wipe down the deck area between tread belt and frame.

For once a month cleaning:

- Unplug treadmill. Let it sit for 10 minutes. Take off motor cover and vacuum inside the motor area, being very careful not to directly touch the static-sensitive electronics.

- Slide clean towel under tread belt and wipe deck and under the belt. Rotate belt 180 degrees and repeat.
- Apply lubrication (only when recommended) under tread belt.
- Check drive belt tension and adjust as necessary.
- Check tread belt tension and tracking and adjust as necessary.

### **Adjust the Tread Belt Properly**

The best treadmills are those that provide you with easy access to belt tracking. But even the best treadmills with the most easily accessible belt tracking are also susceptible to stretch slightly under initial use. That is why it is important that you adjust the tread belt every so often to keep down stretching.

Most manufacturers include the Allen wrench in the package when you buy a treadmill from them. Use that to tighten both belt adjustment screws clockwise. If your manufacturer did not supply you with an Allen wrench, use another of the right size.

A  $\frac{1}{4}$  turn clockwise should tighten tread belt if it has loosened from breaking in. The screws for belt adjustment are usually located at the rear end of the treadmill. Some belts do require looser running than others so don't be surprised if your tread belt is a little loose even when you haven't used it yet. Check the user's guide before making adjustments just to make sure.

Moreover, be sure to keep the belt running at a low speed of around 3 mph when adjusting the belt tracking. This is the ideal speed when making any adjustments with the screws.

## **Ensure Proper Alignment of Belt**

The tracking adjustments may also be used to properly align the belt of your treadmill. So, when adjusting your belt tracking, be sure not to turn either side more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  turn at a time only. Belt tracking adjustments are almost always minor anyway, so don't overdo your adjustments.

Roller knocking occurs with improper belt tracking. This should be avoided at all times. If you hear a knocking noise when running your treadmill, that most often means that you have a defective roller. However, there are instances where the noise results from the belt placing too much force on the roller from side to side. You will recognize the difference between the cases in that the knocking noise in the latter will be at a much slower rhythm than roller rotation.

One way to reduce the load on belt is proper tracking. Not only that, it will also help guide the belt and ensure that the front and rear rollers are parallel. Just follow the manufacturer's directions on belt tracking to keep from misaligning or over-stretching the belt. A word of caution: be careful not to over-tighten belt when adjusting alignment.

## **Use Treadmill on Level Floor**

Wondering why your treadmill is making all those squeaking sounds? Well, before you decide to pick up the phone and call your manufacturer, check if your treadmill is running on a non-level floor. Often, the number one reason why treadmills make squeaking noise and its belt mistracking is that people place their treadmills on ground that isn't consistently leveled, without even realizing why.

Most treadmills have level adjustment in rear supports. If your treadmill cannot be leveled with the floor, then level the floor with your treadmill instead.

### **Power Cord, Belt, and Deck**

It's standard procedure among all electronic equipment – you should keep the power cord free and away from places where people are likely going to step on it. The same rule applies with treadmills, especially if you are using the electronic type as opposed to its manual counterpart. Also, make sure that the power cord is clear of the incline mechanism.

When it comes to maintenance of your treadmill's belt, it is accepted that you lubricate the belt every so often. When you do that, try to avoid using silicone or oils, unless the manufacturer itself recommends it. The ideal combination for a long-lasting treadmill is often a clean, dry and dust-free bed and belt.

Only use silicone spray when the manufacturer recommends it. And even then, be sure to follow the manufacturer's directions closely, especially when it comes to application schedule and type of lubricant. Some treadmill decks may require initial waxing to help reduce friction with the belt. Unless recommended by the manufacturer, however, do not wax a deck. Lubrication to pretreated wax decks may gump the wax.

### **Ensure Low Friction between Deck and Belt**

To begin with, you want low-friction contact between the deck and belt. Damage to the motor electronics is more likely if the friction between the deck and belt is high. In addition, high friction belts will not coast when power is shut off. Neither will they be easy to dead-walk on when the power is off. Basically, high friction belts can cause the motor to stall – a situation which you do not want to happen as this is one sure-fire way of damaging your treadmill's motor.

To avoid high friction contact between the deck and the belt, be sure to follow your treadmill manufacturer's guidelines for proper deck and belt maintenance. Lubrication when unnecessary can lead to excessive amp draw and subsequent damage to motor electronics.

## **Blown Fuses**

You don't usually discover blow fuses, unless you are doing or having someone do some technical diagnostics on your treadmill. And even then, it is generally not recommended for users to replace blown fuses in the motor or motor controller.

When replacing blown fuses, you have to use the recommended fuse. This is true even if you're referring to an electronic piece that isn't a treadmill. When it comes to treadmill fuses, however, you have to understand that they are not interchangeable with automotive fuses. And so, if you discover a blow fuse in your treadmill, do not even attempt to make replacements on your own. Instead, contact a dealer for proper replacement.

## **Ground to an AC Wall Outlet**

Why an AC wall outlet, you ask? Well, with many users owning treadmills that come equipped with computer consoles (such as those with programming) these days, console crashes are also becoming common. A computer crash may be anything that occurs out of the ordinary, such as a display blanking out, locking up, or not recording information. It could even be that the treadmill simply wouldn't shut down altogether. One way to determine that a crash is not due to a defect is to turn the treadmill power off and then on again.

The process of cycling power on and off will reset the computers most of the time. If the crash is caused by a computer defect, this will likely result in loss of control to incline and speed or the treadmill may not even start at all. One way to safeguard your treadmill from console crashes is to plug the equipment into a grounded AC outlet.

If, however, the crash occurs frequently or is repeated, then consider the option of having it replaced. Most manufacturers that offer warranties in their products include console crashes in their warranty.

### **Read the Owner's Manual**

All of the above are meant to be steps you take once everything else in the owner's manual fails to yield the result you want. But as what the old adage says: "An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure." No amount of repair and maintenance tips can compare to what you can prevent by just reading through your treadmill owner's manual.

The manual contains all the tips and advice for your treadmill's proper maintenance – something you can really use if you want to save from costly repairs. All maintenance procedures should be listed in the owner's manual, along troubleshooting guidelines, parts listings, and instructions on repairs. Damage to your treadmill from improper use or unauthorized tampering can result in the manufacturer voiding the warranty. That is why, if you are in doubt about proper handling of your treadmill, contact either your dealer or the manufacturer for recommended care.

## **Run for Your Life: The Health Benefits of Treadmills**

Improve your heart's health? Lose a few pounds? Or simply become more active? If that is your goal, then maybe it's time for you to do some exercise. But where do you start?

No matter how good our intentions are, we really can't force ourselves to commute three or four times a week to the gym. What with our hectic lifestyles, increased work loads, and various other commitments, we simply don't have such luxury as time. As a result, our exercise routines suffer, which, of course, points only to one thing – our health.

For this reason, Americans, young and old alike, are trying to search for solutions to their exercise dilemma. They are looking for specifically one that will fit into their demanding schedules yet still afford them with a quality workout with positive results. The answer, of course, is the ever-present treadmill.

### **Scientific Facts**

Experts agree that physical activity need not be strenuous in order to be beneficial. In fact, only moderate amounts of daily physical activity are recommended for people of all ages. Too much can lead to injuries, menstrual abnormalities, and bone weakening.

- Among American youths aged 12-21 years, almost half admit to not being vigorously active on a regular basis
- 14 % of young people report that they engage in no recent physical activity
- This inactivity trend is more common among females (14%) than among males (7%). Among black females, 21% are inactive, while white females only comprise 12%.

- As age or grade in school increases, participation in all types of physical activity declines strikingly
- Of all high school students, only 19% are physically active for 20 minutes or more, five days a week, in physical education class
- Between 1991 and 1995, daily enrollment in physical education classes dropped from 42 percent to 25 percent
- Well designed school-based interventions directed at increasing physical activity in physical education classes have been shown to be effective
- Social support from family and friends has been consistently and positively related to regular physical activity

Though not the be-all and end-all of everything, engaging in physical activity does have effects that can be very beneficial to your health. First, it helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints. Not only that, but it has a direct effect on weight control, building lean muscles, and fat reduction. Physical activity can also prevent or delay the development of high blood pressure and helps reduce blood pressure in some adolescents with hypertension.

If physical education doesn't do the job (especially if you're no longer schooling), then engage in physical activity at home by your own initiative. Home exercise equipment, such as treadmills and stationary bikes, have been known to produce the same effects as running or walking outside.

A study published in the Journal of the American Association showed that treadmills easily outpaced an exercise bicycle, a rowing machine, and a cross-country skiing machine. The study was conducted with a group of volunteers at



the Milwaukee Veterans Administration Hospital. The volunteers were made to do a series of workouts on different machines, each time exercising at what felt like the same intensity.

To measure the number of calories burned, researchers used a special device.

Dr. Martin Hoffman of the Medical College of Wisconsin found that “the treadmill allowed the individuals to burn as much as 200 calories per hour more than the bicycle ergometer, which came out having the lowest energy expenditure.”

### **The #1 Choice in Home Exercise Equipment**

As a home exercise equipment, the treadmill presents both convenience and affordability in one neat package. It's not as expensive as other home exercise equipment and yet it produces very nearly the same positive results. Not only that, but the treadmill has always been a favorite among exercise enthusiasts, whether they do their exercises at home or in the gym.

Using a treadmill to exercise and burn down calories is very simple, even the most un-sporty individual can do it. Why? Because a treadmill requires nothing more from you than doing something that you've been doing for most of your life – WALKING.

“They will probably always be the Number 1 item because they appeal to the two most popular forms of exercising – walkers and runners,” said Communications Director for the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association Mike May.

According to the annual consumer survey of the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, more than 45 million Americans currently use treadmills today, either at home or in a gym. They are even more popular than stationary bikes (considered as the Number 2 choice), stair machines, ellipticals, and rowing machines.

Perhaps, what makes treadmills really stick among the mass of exercise and fitness enthusiasts is that it can guarantee a consistent workout in all seasons and in all climates. With a treadmill, you do not have to think about common running worries, such as weather conditions – too hot, too cold, too windy, too wet, too humid, and so on. Treadmills provide a means of exercise that is “just right.”

### **Why Treadmills?**

Your goal when engaging in physical activity is to burn down calories and keep yourself physically fit and healthy. Compared to just 500 calories per hour on the exercise bike, the average medium-intensity treadmill workout burned 700 calories per hour. Dr. Hoffman said that one reason for this difference is the amount of muscle mass that is used in both exercises. Apparently, when you walk or run on a treadmill, you use more muscles than you do on a bike, stationary or otherwise.

The greatest benefit of treadmill exercise is burning calories. However, it is not the only reason why you should consider this type of workout. For people with certain health conditions, engaging in vigorous physical activity can be detrimental to their lives and their health. People such as those with osteoporosis, hypertension, and back pains are recommended to do no more than walking when they exercise so as not to cause any overexert themselves. The

treadmill, therefore, provides them with an exciting alternative to just plain walking outside.

A treadmill can add consistency to your walking workout. Most models have programming in them that allow you to maintain speed and intensity throughout your entire workout. They also have an incline device that would let you control the inclination of your walk, exactly as though you are walking up or down hill.

Walking for 45 minutes, five times a week can cut your chances of getting a flu or cold in half, according to a research conducted by the Harvard Medical School. But you can't really walk, can you, if it's raining outside? That is why the treadmill - where climate changes don't matter - is great to have around.

Furthermore, the treadmill can be used by anyone – young, old, male, female, pregnant, not pregnant.... Let's take pregnant women, for example. While some aerobic activities can be risky during pregnancy, walking is actually beneficial to both the child and the mother. Hormonal changes caused by pregnancy can loosen ligaments. In order to tone muscles down and strengthen the joints that support the growing baby, walking is recommended for pregnant women.

The treadmill also helps prevent injuries that could happen when you run outside on uneven or even wet ground. Gravity can have very nasty effects, however beneficial running and sunlight might be. A treadmill with good cushioning on the belt will help support each foot-strike you make, making your running or walking easier.

Finally, if you are just looking to get in shape, walking or jogging on a treadmill improves muscle tone and not just in your legs, but all over your body. Strengthened muscles means the heart can pump more oxygen-rich blood with each step you take.

## **Exercising the Right Way on a Treadmill**

You know what they say: “You get the most out of anything if you do it properly.” Exercising the right way on a treadmill is no different. If you want to get the most enjoyment and benefit out of treadmill exercise, then do it the right way.

Here are some tips to help you maximize the health benefits of treadmill exercise:

### ***1. Footwork***

As your foot comes forward and your heel strikes the ground, here’s what you do: raise your toes and roll forward onto the outside of your foot (but keep the entire shoe sole on the ground). As your foot passes under your body, straighten your knee and press the ground with the ball of your foot, maintaining pressure until your toes leave the ground. Do this for the entire duration of your run.

### ***2. Hip Rotation***

Walk from your waist, allowing your hips to rotate naturally with the forward and backward movement of your legs. Meanwhile, your shoulders should stay relaxed and facing forward.

### ***3. Arm Swing***

Let your arms swing at your sides in the same forward-backward direction as your hips and legs. As you increase your speed, bend your arms at a right angle and swing them faster in rhythm with your legs.

Do all of the above and you'll be fit in no time. Elaine Ward of NARWF says that to get the most out of your walking routine, you have to consider the way your foot touches the ground, how your torso is positioned, and how your arms swing. The above tips should be able to help you do just that.

## **The “Don’ts” of Buying Treadmills**

Though competitive runners are advised to run on the road, there are several reasons why you should buy treadmills anyway. You might have a family which means that your schedule does not have the flexibility it once had. A treadmill would solve that bit of a problem. Or you might be worried about suffering injuries. Running on a treadmill is generally less likely to cause a running injury than running outside. We could go on and on about the merits of buying a treadmill, but when you do get to buying a treadmill, what are the important things that you should remember?

A treadmill is a big investment. It might not be a car. It certainly isn't a house. But you do spend around \$1000 of your hard-earned money on a piece of metal that is supposed to help you burn down calories and generally stay healthy. Why would you waste your money on something that doesn't work, or has very low shelf life?

So before you put down your credit card, consider all the factors involved. The first thing you should concern yourself with is budget. But second to that are several more variables and the thing you should and shouldn't look for in a treadmill.

Listed here are some of the “don'ts” you should think about when you buy a treadmill.

### **Don't Skimp on a Weak Engine**

The treadmill is made of seven components and each one of these is important in their own sphere. However, what really makes a treadmill work as it does is the engine, or its motor, as what it's more commonly called. When you buy a treadmill, ***don't try to save money by buying a cheap treadmill with a weak engine.*** Not only do you have to avoid weak engines all together, but you have to make sure that the treadmill you choose has the “continuous duty” horsepower, abbreviated as CHP in the specs.

A decent treadmill would have a horsepower of around 1.5. Commercial grade treadmills could as much as 5.0 horsepower (HP).

One way to find out how much HP you need is to ask yourself how often you'd be using your treadmill. If you are only planning to use it occasionally when running outside is out of the question because of bad weather, then you can probably get away with something less than 2 CHP. However, if you plan on putting lots of mileage on your treadmill, or perhaps you're a heavier runner, then look for something that has more than 2 CHP.

### **Don't Overlook Speed**

An average treadmill would have a maximum speed of 10 MPH – that is 6 minutes per mile. If you're like most people (who run twice every week or some such), that should be enough. However, if you tend to run repeats or you run at a much faster pace than that, then ***don't overlook speed when you go treadmill shopping.*** Obviously, you want a machine that can keep up with your pace, and you can't have that from a machine that is only capable of 8 MPH or below in terms of speed.

If speed is what you want, choose a machine that will move at your pace. That should be the rule. Stay away from machines that can't even move at 10 MPH, because that's very telling on how the treadmill was constructed. Hey, we all want to move faster and if the treadmill can't even keep up with the average speed, then why would you want something like that?

### **Don't Settle for Short and Narrow**

One question: Can you keep an even line when you run? I don't think anyone can. Besides, if that *were* the case, we'd all be running in treadmills six inches wide. Wouldn't that be a picture? Just imagine running while focusing on burning calories, while keeping an eye on the timer, while concentrating on staying *on* the thing.... It's just not viable. So when you buy a treadmill, make sure that you ***don't settle for one with a short and narrow deck.***

Your treadmill doesn't even have to be too wide. Remember, you're placing that thing in your house so unless you bought a treadmill that can be folded (much more expensive!), then you'd better pick one that is wide enough for you run effectively, but narrow enough to save space in your home. Of course, the rule always would be "the wider the better," but pay attention to space anyway.

When it comes to length, your choice depends on how steady your pace is, as well as how long your stride is. If you find yourself always slowing down and drifting off the back when you're almost done with the run, a longer deck would be a wise choice. That way, you'll have time to catch up before you fall off!

The length of the deck also depends on your height. Taller runners tend to have longer strides and, hence, need longer decks. But then again, if your goal is to improve your form, shorter decks are excellent, because they will force you to keep the strike turnover quick and snappy. A treadmill with a deck that is somewhere between 52 inches and 60 inches is the average. Anything shorter

than 52 inches would be too short and you'll find yourself feeling a bit like a hamster on a wheel. A treadmill over 60 inches long would just be impractical.

### **Don't Fall for Products without Money-back Guarantees**

Two things you must consider when you buy a treadmill: cushioning and foldability. The first has to do more with avoiding injury. The second really isn't a word (but you get the point).

One of the main reasons why people buy treadmills today is to avoid injury. Many running injuries happen because the ground really is not suitable for running (but you run anyway, because, well, calories are aplenty and you need to get a-burning). Treadmills are one way of avoiding getting leg injuries and the reason for this is the cushioning provided.

However, the bad thing about it is that there's really no way for you to determine this accurately. The store may let you run on a treadmill but probably only for 30 minutes or less, and that's just too short to make an accurate assessment. Worse if you're buying the treadmill on the Internet. Then there's really no way for you to know how cushioned the treadmill is. That is why it is important that you ***don't buy products that do not have money-back guarantees***. The product description can only tell you so much, but once you get the package at home and test it out, you find out that the cushioning isn't enough and there isn't a lot to support each foot-strike.

The other fact about treadmills that is difficult to ascertain (if you're buying online, that is) is its foldability. Having a treadmill that folds up and out of the way is great. It's space-saving, perfect if there's already too little space in your house. And don't even think "backyard" because that's never going to work (Hello? Treadmill?). So unless you have ample space in your basement or your



garage, you need a treadmill that can be folded and takes as little space as possible.

### **Don't Sniff at the Other Specs**

Sure, a treadmill is mainly for running. Why spend an extra Benjamin or so for something so wacky as a drink holder on a treadmill? You have an end table. Use it. But the thing is that while you can make do without all those unnecessary frills in a treadmill (e.g. walkman holder, drink holder, arm rest, etc.), ***don't outright place all other equally "unnecessary" specs out of the picture.*** Because it might turn out that they aren't as unnecessary as you think.

Take the heart rate monitoring feature, for instance. You don't need it that much. However, if you really want to fine tune your performance, then you will want to run with a program that measures your heart rate. The same HRM may be used indoors or outdoors. Some treadmills may even display your heart rate on the main display so you can keep a constant eye on it as you run. It's a minor convenience to be sure, but you will soon find that it isn't as over-the-top as you believe.

So how does it work? It varies from one treadmill model to another. But basically, the treadmill will pickup the signal from your Polar monitor or from a chest strap provided. Other treadmills monitor the heart rate of the runner through their hand grips (not very practical though. Who wants to run while gripping fixed handrails?). Still other treadmills have added a slick new feature in their heart rate monitor by making it so that the belt's speed adjusts to a predefined heart rate range.

Another nifty feature of a treadmill that you should probably consider is programmable workouts. It's not an absolute must, but if you have a set of favorite hill, interval, or repetition workouts, you can do them now on your

treadmill through the programmable workout feature and save them for use on a regular basis.

### ***Don't Go For Shakes and Shudders***

The answer is pretty much obvious. Hey, if you wanted to run on a surface that shakes and shudders, you could always do that...on a skateboard on top of a high-rise building, you screaming like crazy. Jokes aside, you ***don't want to run on a treadmill that shakes and shudders with every step.*** Make sure that the frame of the treadmill is steady and is even supported.

It is a widely accepted fact that the heavier a treadmill is, the steadier it will be, and the less likely it will shake and shudder. However, this isn't always true, so be sure to double check. Look at the footprint and at descriptions as to how the deck is built. If you want a clue to finding out the stability of a treadmill, check out the maximum user weight. That should give some idea on how stable and solid a treadmill is.

### ***Don't Do Too Much Incline***

Generally, treadmills have a maximum incline of between 10 and 15 %. Anything more than that could involve safety issues which you have to check with the manufacturer first. So just to be safe, ***don't overdo inclines.***

Consider what you are running for. If you are running to train, then also consider the course you are training for. If it's for hilly courses, then you will really need to train on a hilly course. A treadmill with a 10% incline should be able to do the

work. It will give you the illusion of pushing your body uphill...an experience that will be somewhat different from an actual run up a hilly path.

However, if you're running a course that has a lot of down hills (like the Boston Marathon, for instance) then a treadmill is not going to be of much help. You can probably try propping the back up with a couple of 2 x 4's, but that would involve another set of safety issues, so again, check with your manufacturer before doing so.

### **Don't Forget the Red Button**

Safety is the most important thing to consider, on par with motor, when buying treadmills. This is especially true in households with children. There are two main safety features found in treadmills and so when you buy one, ***don't forget to check for these: the safety key and the emergency off button.***

Some treadmills offer only the safety key. Others offer both the emergency button and the safety key. It is best that you get a treadmill that offers both of these. If not, then weigh down the merits of each feature carefully before buying.

A safety key treadmill requires that the key be in place to turn the treadmill on. It usually has a way to attach the key to the runner so that if the runner falls or gets too far away, the key will pull out and stop the treadmill.

The emergency off button on the other hand is just a red button that you can push to turn off the treadmill immediately.

## **How to Buy a Treadmill Online**

When it comes to pieces of aerobic equipment to buy, treadmills continue to be the most popular and the most valuable. And why not? They are simple to use

and naturally intuitive. They burn calories effectively and offer a wide range of exercise options, whether walking, climbing, or jogging.

In fact, the treadmill has so many uses and so many benefits that many people want to buy it. For better or for worse, this is also one of the reasons why it is the most saturated category in the fitness equipment industry. And also the reason why it is difficult to choose the right product for the right price.

Below are some helpful tips to give you some idea on what to look for in a treadmill and basically how to buy a treadmill online.

## Shopping Tips

The first concern you should have when shopping for a treadmill is ***your goal***. Why are you buying a treadmill? Is it because you want to be able to keep up with your running routine despite the weather? Or is it because you prefer running indoors than outdoors?

Consider how often you will be using your treadmill. If you are only going to use it occasionally, then you might be better off with a treadmill that comes at a decent price.

Also, ***consider other potential exercisers*** in your home. Most families will have more than one individual that will likely be using the treadmill. If your family is one of these, then make sure that your treadmill answers their exercise needs as well.

When shopping for a treadmill, it is important that you consider the reasons why you're buying a treadmill in the first place. Under-buying or buying a low quality, under-powered treadmill that doesn't meet long-term needs of all users in the household is a mistake you won't want to make.

However, if you are indeed looking to buy a treadmill, chances are that you have already done a lot of research on your own. In fact, you probably already know which features you want in a treadmill. But if you want a good deal that won't turn sour in the long run, another consideration you should have is ***not all treadmill brands are the same***.

Consider this one situation, for example:

- Choice 1: Brand X: 2.5 HP motor \$975
- Choice 2: Brand Y: 1.5 HP motor \$799
- Choice 3: Brand Z: 2.0 HP motor \$1299

The obvious choice would be Choice 1 because, as all treadmill buying rules state, you should choose the treadmill that provides more motor power for less. But you shouldn't limit your choice to that single consideration alone. You cannot make a buy based only on motor power, since that may not be enough of a guarantee that the treadmill is a good buy.

It is quite possible that Choice 3 is the better choice, considering that Brand Z has a reputation for delivering quality treadmill with extensive warranties. Although motor power is a good feature to consider when buying a treadmill, you have to be careful. Look at it in the context of the whole treadmill, including even the brand.

Another important tip in treadmill buying is ***don't always believe what the salesperson tells you.*** Of course, we're not saying that salespersons are not to be trusted. But in this day and age, it's a smart buyer who gets everything in writing first before committing to anything. After all, salespersons can make mistakes, too, and sometimes these mistakes can end up costing you.

The last consideration that you have when shopping for a treadmill is the price. When we say price, we don't mean the amount indicated in the price tag. In fact, ***forget about the price tag all together and look at the real price of the treadmill.***

There is no doubt that price is one of the most important factors when buying a treadmill. But sometimes, as you have probably experienced before with a completely different product, price can be very misleading. So when you buying a treadmill, don't base your decision on the price tag alone and consider everything else about the product to determine its real price.

### **What's in the treadmill motor?**

Perhaps the most important component of the treadmill is the motor. In fact, as stated earlier, most people tend to base their decision in determining good treadmills on motor power. So what's the deal with a treadmill's motor?

One difference in treadmill motors, which isn't always reflected in the product literature, is whether the manufacturer lists horsepower in terms of "continuous duty" or "peak performance." A manufacturer may be able to get a motor to operate up to 2 HP at peak-performance levels, but that doesn't mean that it will perform at 2 HP consistently. Some manufacturers actually claim that they've got a 1.5 HP motor, but when you push it, you find that the motor can actually reach up to 2.5 HP at peak level.

If you're on a budget and want a very inexpensive treadmill, our suggestion is you buy a treadmill with a manual motor instead of an electric. The reason is simply that manual ones are less likely to break down. However, the downside to this

buying choice is that manuals have the disadvantage of being slower and more difficult to operate because the user powers the belt. And so, if the exerciser begins to tire and slows down, the belt slows down, too.

On the other hand, the belt of an electric model continues at the same speed, motivating the exerciser to keep going as well.

## **Other Treadmill Features to Consider**

Treadmills vary according to the type of features they have. Knowing what these features are can help you in buying a treadmill, whether online or offline.

- ***AC or DC motor*** – Most home treadmill units are DC. Commercial treadmills may have either AC or DC. AC treadmills will likely require a dedicated power line, considering how their motors tend to draw more power. Not only that, AC also tends to be noisier than DC.
- ***The thickness of the running belt*** – Admittedly, you cannot maintain a straight line while running. If that were true, you can just go ahead and run on a balance beam, six inches wide. That is why the thickness of the running belt is an important feature to consider. In addition, two-ply belts are stronger and less likely to curl at the sides than one-ply belts.
- ***The length of the running surface*** – Next to the thickness is the length. If you are a taller than average person, you might need more running surface for you to make sweeping strides on your treadmill. On the other hand, if you want to really challenge yourself with short, brisk strides, then get a treadmill with a shorter running surface.
- ***The minimum and maximum speed*** – Ask yourself whether you'll be using your treadmill for walking or running. Treadmills for walking start at 0 or .5 and go up to around 6 or 6 mph, while those for jogging or running generally start at 0, .5, or 1 mph and go up to 8-12 mph.
- ***The percentage of incline*** – It can range from a low of 2-4% to a high of 15%. The general rule is the bigger the better, but there are exceptions to the rule: Not all treadmills with high percentage of incline are good buys, especially if you take in all the other features of the product. Commercial-grade treadmills often go as high as 25%.
- ***The type of incline adjustment*** – The most high-tech incline adjustment is the automatic incline. This type of incline changes depending upon the exerciser's heart rate, sometimes via a wireless monitor that detects the person's heart rate and automatically adjusts the percentage of incline to keep the person within the target heart range. Other treadmills have electronic inclines that can be altered by pushing a

button on the console, while less sophisticated ones have either a manual hand crank or other manual adjustment that has to be set before starting to exercise.

- ***Electronic feedback displays of speed, time, and distance*** – On most treadmills, these are generally standard, but some treadmills have added a few extras in their feedback monitor. For instance, some treadmills can display the number of calories burned or the user's heart rate. In addition, most treadmills offer preset and/or customizable programming capabilities. This is a pretty nifty feature to have since you can now design your own program with the use of the customizing capabilities of your treadmill.

## **Features to Look for in a Good Treadmill**

Sometimes, knowing the features of a typical treadmill is not enough to help you determine a good buy. So below, we have provided you with a list of features to covet in a treadmill:

- ***Emergency Shut Off*** – Usually, these are magnets or buttons you yank or push to cut power instantly. This is very efficient if you get into trouble on your treadmill.
- ***Hand Rails*** – I know. Who wants to get hampered, holding onto a rail while running? Well, consider what the hand rails are for, first, before you dismiss the notion. You need at least one just for safety and balance. If not, then at least get one with a slightly extended front rail.
- ***Cushioning*** – How much is based on personal preference. This is for less impact and more comfort with each foot strike you make.
- ***Safety Lock or Switch*** – This is advisable if you have kids who love to fiddle with things and accidentally start the machine.
- ***Warranties*** – At least one year manufacturer's warranty on parts and labor. Most companies these days offer various levels on frames, motors, parts and labor that vary from 1-5 years, with some even offering 10 years or limited lifetime. Check on the limits, though.

## **Now Comes the Features to Avoid**

If there are features in a treadmill that you ought to covet, there are also features that you need to avoid. These are the following:

- Incline adjustments that require you to dismount and move pins or other mounts on a support leg. This is very inconvenient and could even affect your exercise routine.
- Non-motorized models. They are a strain on joints and muscles and mean irregular speeds since you can't "pull" at a steady pace with your stride, especially if you run where you spend a few milliseconds on every stride off the belt in the air and obviously not able to pull.
- Start speeds of 1.0 mph or more
- No warranty
- Surface areas that are short or narrow
- Single-ply belts
- Less than 1.5 HP
- AC or treadmill-duty motors
- Shaking, rattling, or squeaking while you workout

So there you have it. As long as you keep these valuable tips and advice in mind as you shop for a treadmill online, there is no reason why you shouldn't end up with a product that turns out to be the best deal you've ever had.