

# NewsLeader

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## FITNESS:

# Taking it personally

Personal trainers are the growing trend in physical fitness

By David Weir  
NEWSLEADER STAFF

Robert Charron bends down to adjust each of the 20-pound weights that are strapped to his ankles. When he's done, he picks up another pair of 20-pound weights, one in each hand, and begins the march down the driveway, his stride noticeably altered because of the extra 80 pounds he's forced to carry.

Once at the end of the driveway, he drops to the ground and gets into a pushup position, ready to begin the long climb up the driveway.

To the casual observer, the whole affair might look like a bizarre form of punishment.

To the 35-year-old Burnaby man, it's all about achieving one of his New Year's resolutions - getting in shape. His trainer, Alex Suaste, calls the exercise "climbing the ground" and it's meant to strengthen the muscles used in rock climbing by simulating the movement on the ground.

Charron is part of the growing trend of using personal trainers to help achieve fitness goals.

Hiring a trainer is nothing new - the rich and famous have done so for years. But recently, there has been a growth in the number of trainers hired by regular people.

"I'm at the point in my life where I'm realizing that the most important thing to me is my vehicle, and my vehicle for me is

my body," Charron said. "If you have a nice car, you put in premium gasoline, but how come we don't do the same thing with our body?"

"So as far as hiring Alex goes, I'm investing in myself."

Personal training has become so popular recently that parks and recreation departments throughout the Lower Mainland now offer personal training for a premium at their recreation centres.

There are a number of reasons why people hire personal trainers. Some are trying to rehabilitate injuries, others are looking to lose weight or improve their health, while yet others are looking for sport-specific workout routines.

The reasons are no different from why many join gyms or drop in at recreation centres, so why turn to a personal trainer?

Charron had gone it alone for many years, gleaning what he could from one book or another, while picking up body building and fitness magazines along the way. But he never achieved the personal gains that he sought.

"My job is to find out what it is that you need and to do it for you - to teach you about how your body works for you," Suaste said. "The problem with most of us is that we go to the gym and spin our wheels for years because we think we know it all and can go in there and grab the

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~ Robert Charron

MARIO BARTEL/NEWSLEADER

## THAT PERSONAL TOUCH

Fitness instructor Alex Suaste works Robert Charron through an exercise that simulates the muscles and control needed for rock climbing. Personal trainers are becoming increasingly popular with people trying to reach their fitness goals.

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# The personal approach to fitness

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weights and copy the next guy."

Charron, in his four months working with Suaste, has come to realize the body building magazines are aimed at serious body builders who can afford to spend a couple of hours a day in the gym lifting weights, not those who are simply trying to get into shape.

He has also learned about proper form and been introduced to sport-specific exercises for such sports as hockey, snowboarding and rock climbing.

"I've learned it's not about the weight, it's about doing them properly," Charron said. "You don't need to use a lot of weight to have a really good workout - like I'm dead tired when I'm working out with Alex."

Adding: "In the world we

live in, it's not about how much you can lift, it's about being active and doing a multitude of different activities, whether it's running around the lake or snowboarding. The type of training that he gives me helps me with my life and really does apply to my life."

While Suaste goes to Charron's home to train him, he meets other clients at Burnaby's Bonsor Recreation Centre where he is on staff as a personal trainer.

It's only been a couple of years since Burnaby's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Department started offering personal training services to its clients for an extra premium.

Bonsor has always offered weight-room orientation programs that were very focused on use of weights and limited to about 20 or 30 minutes. But those did not include tips on nutrition or developing an individualized program.

But now for \$35 an hour, patrons of the city's recreation centres can hire a personal trainer to work with them one-on-one. That's compared to the \$40 to \$60 an hour trainers charge privately, and is way less than the upwards of \$100 paid by show business types.

Gary Mockler, the facility manager of Bonsor Recreation Centre, said the city started offering the service in response to the growing demand for specific knowledge and niche programs and services.

"I think generally the response has been very positive," Mockler said. "The response to the fee is that it is very reasonable for what they are getting. We've never had any complaints about our fee, which by comparison to other fitness clubs or other personalized, private one-on-one sessions, is very reasonable."

"And people have indicated they would be willing to pay more, especially if they are able to get the quality and real specific information, coaching and direction that they want."

Burnaby is not alone in employing personal trainers at its recreation centre - nearly every other municipality in the Lower Mainland does the same.

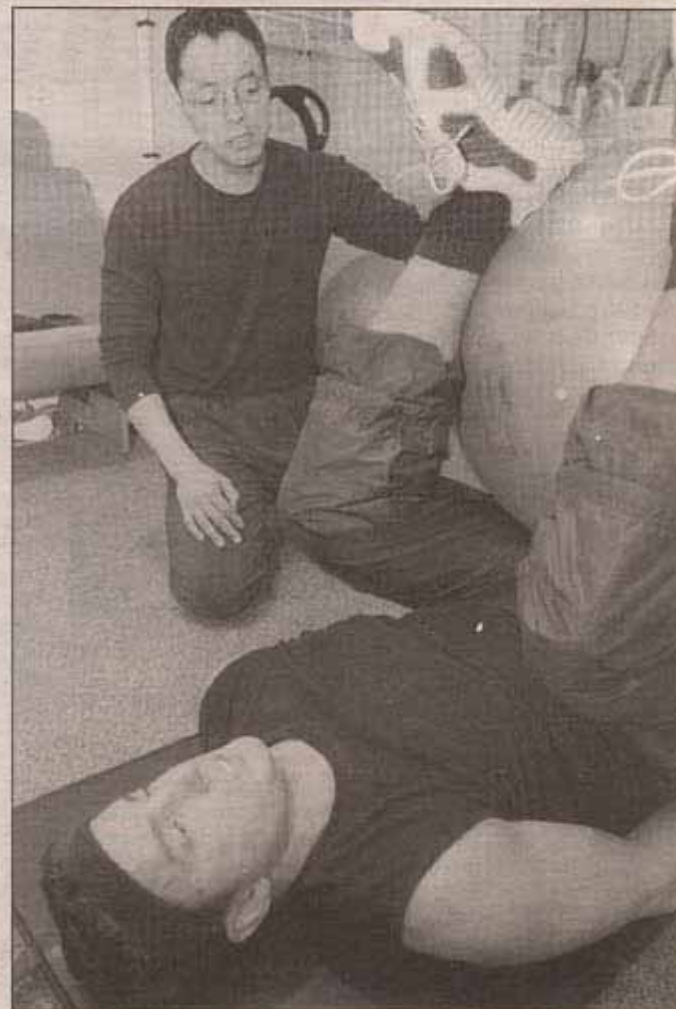
But one place bucking the trend is the City of New Westminster, which does not offer personal trainers for hire on an hourly basis.

Rather than have patrons pay an extra fee for personal trainers, New Westminster employs staff who are capable of working with clients to not only show them how to use the equipment, but also develop or revise fitness programs. And there is no extra fee, nor is there a need to book appointments with fitness staff.

"In that way we don't call them personal trainers," said Christine DeBiasio, fitness programmer at the Canada Games Pool. "They're fitness staff that are available to everybody, but they don't cost anything for the people coming in."

"New West has this philosophy in parks and rec where they're always trying to increase value for people. We're on the higher end of admission rates and monthly passes, so we always try to give people a lot of value for what they're spending."

Charron likes the fact he has two workouts a week scheduled with Suaste and



MARIO BARTEL/NEWSLEADER

Alex Suaste says you don't need a lot of fancy equipment to develop a good workout routine. He works with one of his clients, Robert Charron, using an inflatable exercise ball.

doesn't mind paying extra for it.

"The workouts that I get with Alex is basically like a new awakening for me - a new experience," he said.

"In order for me to know as much as he does, I'd have to go through as much as he has, but I don't have the time to do that. But I can just give him some money and he can train me." ♦

## Tips to get started and stay on your exercise program

1. Work out with a friend for support. You keep each other on track and it's much harder to back out of a workout when you have someone else counting on you.

2. Variety is the key. Try different kinds of workouts within the week to prevent boredom. This also helps with injury prevention because you are not continuously taxing the same muscle groups each workout session.

3. Do the kinds of activities that you like. There are endless exercise options - find something that you enjoy and you will be more likely to stick with it.

4. Start off your exercise program slowly, especially if you have not been active for some time. Start with 15-20 minutes of activity daily and do not increase more than 10 per cent weekly to prevent injury and pain.

5. Be patient. Trying to get and stay healthy takes time. Small, manageable steps are the best way to make permanent changes to your health.

6. As you begin to exercise, you will be more aware of what you are putting into your body for fuel. Make small changes to your diet each week so that you do not feel

deprived. Try cutting out the high fat snacks first and then work on adding more fruits and vegetables at each meal.

7. Seek help from a professional. Personal trainers can help get you started if you are a beginner or update your current program to meet specific exercise goals.

8. Set short and long term goals for yourself. A great initial goal may be to simply increase your energy level while you work on a longer range goal like running your first 10km race.

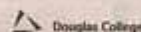
9. Don't get caught in fitness information overload! There is so much to know and it can all be quite confusing when you are just looking to get into better shape. Focus on being active and the rest will come.

10. Don't forget to rest! Depending on your current fitness level, you need at least one day of rest each week. If you are a beginner, you may want to start off with one day on, one day off until you begin to increase your strength and endurance. Check with a fitness professional for more specific guidelines.

Source: Canada Games Fitness Centre, New Westminster

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