

# BBB Tip: Joining a Gym or Purchasing At-Home Equipment? Avoid New Year Fraud!

Submitted by Kelvin H. Collins, President/CEO, Better Business Bureau

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**T**he beginning of a new year is often associated with increased interest in gym memberships, at-home workout equipment, and programs designed around living a healthier lifestyle. As consumers recover from holiday celebrations, including holiday dinners typically more robust than the standard fare, the new year offers plenty of opportunities to help shed those extra servings of stuffing. However, it is important to remain mindful of con artists who take advantage of shopper trends for their own gain and keep realistic fitness goals that consumers can carry throughout the year.

Rather than signing up for fitness classes at a local gym, many consumers may decide to purchase at-home equipment to exercise. For the past five years, Internet searches for 'workout equipment' peak during January. As is typical in the new year, BBB is expecting an increase in reports of fraudulent businesses advertising the sale of workout equipment that is either never received or of poor quality.

One consumer reported a loss of \$2,100 when purchasing an elliptical workout machine online. After paying for the equipment via Amazon Pay, the consumer reported they "received no confirmation or contact of any kind. I received no response when emailing the company."

In addition to the challenges presented by unethical and fraudulent businesses, consumers interested in improving their physical health in the new year must also assess their fitness goals and determine their priorities when choosing a gym membership or at-home system.

## BBB provides the following tips to get the most out of your new year fitness goals:

**Ask questions about limited free trials.** Gyms often give a one-week free pass for potential members, and at-home programs provide a trial period to allow consumers to determine if it is the right fit for their fitness goals. If interested in a gym membership, spend the time to realistically determine what time of the day you would be available to dedicate toward exercise and visit the gym during these times to see how crowded it is or if there is a wait for equipment you would typically use in your workout routine. Check to see if limited trials are offered for any classes or specialized programs.

**Don't feel coerced.** Do not give in to high-pressure sales tactics to join a workout program immediately or make a purchase online without first researching the seller or business. A reputable gym or program will give you enough time to read the contract thoroughly, tour the facilities and make an informed decision. Be especially wary of claims that seem too good to be true, such as a guarantee of losing a large amount of weight extremely quickly.

**Calculate the true costs.** Gyms and at-home workout programs often use introductory offers to encourage new members, especially in the new year. However, the price could go up more than you budgeted once the initial period is over. Make sure to read the contract carefully and understand the regular monthly fees and what they include.

**Take a tour.** If choosing a gym membership, take the time to tour the facility and make sure the gym has the equipment, classes and trainers you need or expect. Pay attention to the things that are important to you, whether that is the cleanliness of the showers or the availability of Wi-Fi. Ask questions and make sure you understand the gym's policies, procedures and how they maintain their equipment.

**Determine your fitness goals.** Determining realistic fitness goals allows you to choose a facility or workout program that is most appropriate for you and will prevent you from failing to follow through with your workout resolution for the rest of the year. Be sure to consult with the physician before embarking on a new fitness regimen, especially if there are medical conditions that might be of concern.

**Figure out your priorities.** What exactly are you looking for in a gym membership or at-home program? Is it a convenient location near your home or a chain with numerous locations around the country that you can go to while traveling? Answering these questions will help you determine the best fit for your lifestyle and fitness goals.

**Understand the terms.** Read the contract carefully before signing and make sure that all verbal promises made by a salesperson are in writing. Pay close attention to the cancellation and renewal policies. Some gyms may charge a cancellation fee if moving or will automatically renew your contract at the end of its term.

**Use a credit card when shopping online.** BBB strongly recommends using a credit card for all online purchases rather than a debit card, wire transfer or mobile banking app transaction. In case of a fraudulent seller or business purchase, credit cards offer additional protection and the ability to cancel charges than other forms of payment.

Start 2026 by visiting [BBB.org](http://BBB.org) for more tips on how to have a fraud-free new year.

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*Kelvin Collins is president & CEO of the Better Business Bureau serving the Fall Line Corridor, serving 77 counties in East Alabama, West Georgia, Southwest Georgia, Central Georgia, East Georgia and Western South Carolina. This tips column is provided through the local BBB and the International Association of Better Business Bureaus (IABBB). The Better Business Bureau sets standards for ethical business behavior, monitors compliance and helps consumers identify trustworthy businesses. Questions or complaints about a specific company or charity should be referred directly to the BBB at Phone: 1-800-763-4222, Web site: [BBB.org](http://BBB.org) or E-mail: [info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org](mailto:info@centralgeorgia.bbb.org).*

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