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## Course objectives

Upon completion of the *Health & Fitness Assessment* home study course, you will be able to:

- understand the pre-participation screening process,
- classify the health-risk status of clients and identify those requiring medical clearance,
- understand the purpose, risks, and benefits of various fitness assessments,
- identify client-specific fitness assessment protocols,
- correctly administer assessment and screening protocols in an appropriate and safe manner,
- interpret the results of fitness assessments with regard to individual physical fitness and normative data, and
- implement strategies to ensure valid and reliable measurements of fitness.

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## Introduction

The completion of health and fitness assessments is a crucial step in the process of delivering personal training services. The appropriate selection, administration, and interpretation of health and fitness assessments are important professional responsibilities for personal trainers. Fitness Assessments are a necessary component of the personal trainer's overall risk management plan. The information obtained from a thorough series of assessments and screening protocols may assist to minimize liability exposures by allowing the fitness professional to identify those participants in need of further medical evaluation. Fitness assessments also provide the baseline data from which realistic and attainable goals may be established and progress toward these goals will be measured. In addition, assessments provide insight and education to the client regarding the strengths and weakness within their personal fitness profile. In some cases, fitness assessments may serve as a motivational tool as well as a strategy to enhance adherence to an exercise program. Finally, perhaps the most obvious purpose of health and fitness assessments is to provide guidance for the safe and effective development of individualized exercise programs.

Just as the exercise program must be individually designed for each client, the selection of health and fitness assessment protocols must also be tailored to the specific goals, needs, and limitations of the client. The individualized approach to both the initial assessments and the subsequent exercise program is one of the many factors adding value to the services of a personal trainer. Certain assessment and screening tools will be necessary for all personal training clients; whereas, some may be considered optional based on the specific goals and needs of the client. The routine components of the initial assessment process are those intended to identify health status, risk stratification, and readiness to safely engage in exercise. These components to be administered with all clients include:

- Personal Health & Lifestyle Questionnaire,
- Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q),
- Health and Risk Appraisal (HRA),
- Resting Blood Pressure and Resting Heart Rate,
- Body Mass Index and/or Waist-to-Hip Ratio,
- Dynamic Postural Screening\*, and
- Cardiorespiratory Endurance.

In addition, other assessments may be performed based on the goals, needs, and desires of the client. These assessments often quantify specific parameters of health-related or skill-related fitness. In addition to *cardiorespiratory endurance*, the other four components of health-related physical fitness include *muscular strength*, *muscular endurance*, *body composition*, and *flexibility*. For those clients that seek to enhance functional or athletic performance, additional assessment protocols may be selected to measure the various components of skill-related fitness such as muscular/anaerobic power, speed, agility, reactivity, coordination, and balance.

Many of the health and fitness assessments must be performed prior to the initiation of an exercise program. However, in the early of stages behavioral change (e.g., adopting a more active lifestyle), many clients will have apprehension, anxiety, and even fear regarding the assessment process. In these cases, it's important to recognize and remain sensitive to the client's feelings and preferences. It may be appropriate and beneficial to postpone non-essential assessments until a later date. In doing so, the personal trainer will have greater success in establishing rapport and trust with the new client. In addition, this thoughtfulness is more likely to create a positive experience for the participant, which may increase adherence to the exercise program and facilitate greater long-term outcomes.

To ensure valid and reliable assessment data as well as a meaningful and professional experience, the following best-practice strategies should be observed.

**Practice and prepare** – The time to learn how to perform an assessment is NOT with your client in front of you. Practice assessments with co-workers, friends, or family members to perfect your skills and abilities *before* assessing your clients. Having greater skill and confidence will increase your credibility and professionalism. In addition, you can be certain that the measurements you obtain are both valid and reliable.

**Set the stage** – Take a few moments to prepare the assessment environment and the necessary equipment *before* your client arrives. Make sure the assessment room or space is large enough to accommodate the planned assessments and the environment is comfortable for your client. Provide your client with an appropriate level of privacy when conducting assessments. Check the equipment to ensure it's in good working order and properly calibrated when necessary. Finally, before conducting the fitness assessments, clearly articulate the purpose and objectives to your client.

\*A detailed review of Dynamic Postural Screening is provided in NETA's *Functional Biomechanics and Applied Kinesiology* home study course.

**Pick proper protocols** – As stated above, some assessment and screening tools will be routinely performed with all clients. Others will be individually selected based on the goals, needs, and limitations of the client. It will be necessary to discuss the client's overall goals and objectives to guide you in the selection of relevant fitness assessment options. Consider important factors such as time, space, equipment, and of course abilities of the participant as you explore the options.

**Create consistency** – Meaningful comparisons between pre- and post-assessment measurements are only possible if the data is obtained in a consistent manner. Therefore, it's very important to adhere to established protocols and standardized procedures. In addition, do everything possible to replicate the same testing experience by using the same equipment, communicating pre-test instructions, ensuring similar environmental conditions, and conducting the same assessment protocols in the same sequence. When performing a series of fitness assessments during the same appointment the following sequence is recommended:

1. Resting measurements (e.g., blood pressure, heart rate)
2. Biometric and anthropometric measurements (e.g., height, weight, body mass index, waist-to-hip ratio).
3. Body composition analysis
4. Cardiorespiratory endurance assessment
5. Dynamic postural assessment
6. Muscular fitness testing (e.g., strength and/or endurance)
7. Flexibility assessment(s)

It may not be possible to replicate the EXACT conditions during each initial and re-assessment appointment, but the more consistency, the better!

**Emphasize the individual** – Throughout this course, we will present normative data and fitness classifications related to many assessment protocols and components of physical fitness. Although some clients may find this information interesting, useful, and even motivating, others may find it discouraging and disappointing. Highly fit and competitive individuals may thrive on comparisons to others as they seek to enhance performance and 'win'. On the other hand, sedentary or less-fit individuals are likely to experience negative emotions in response to 'below average' or 'poor' fitness ratings. This information may be counter-productive by reducing self-efficacy and desire to pursue fitness goals. Therefore, it's important to empathize with your client and understand *their* sources of motivation (or demotivation). Focus goal-setting on the improvement of *individual* health and fitness, rather than competition and comparisons with others.

**Explore the options** – This home study course is not all-inclusive. Although we will review a significant number of assessments, MANY others also exist. Take the time to familiarize yourself with the vast menu of options including those that go beyond basic assessments of physical fitness and into parameters of performance (speed, power, agility, etc.). Refer to the references and recommended reading sections of this home study course for additional health and fitness assessment resources.