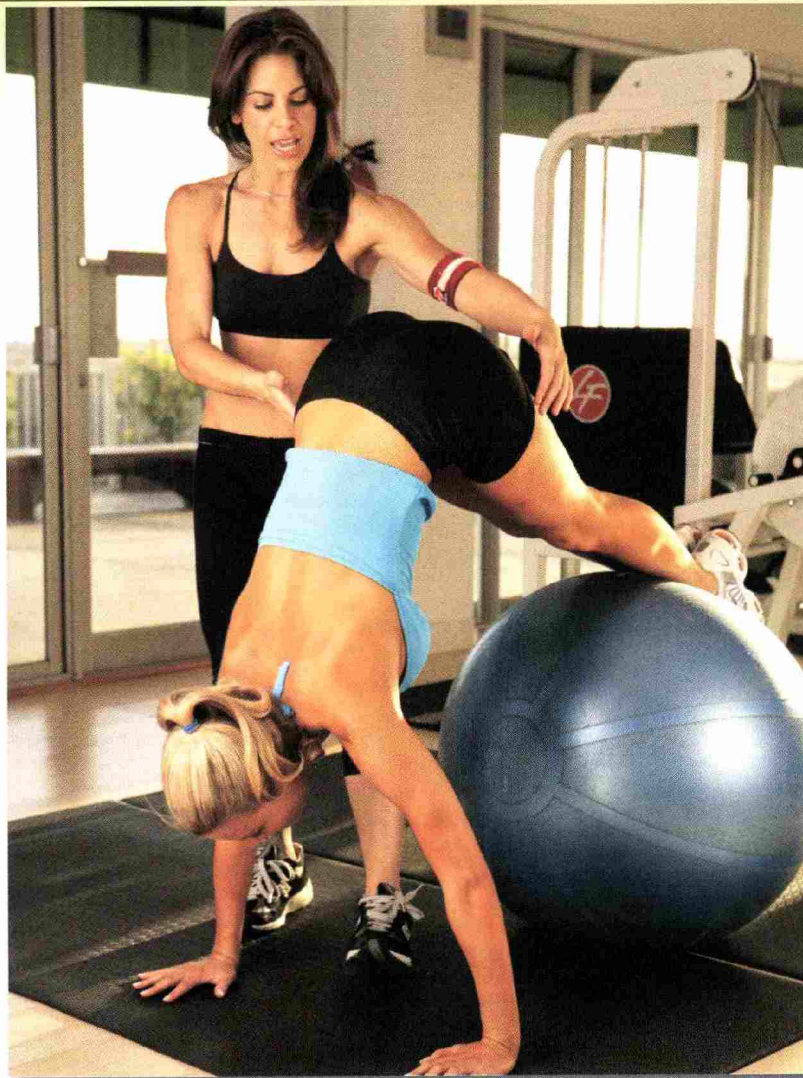


**Club Scene** *By Carol Ann Weber*

**FITNESS  
TRENDS OF  
2009:**

**Personal  
Trainer  
Certification  
is Becoming  
Stricter**

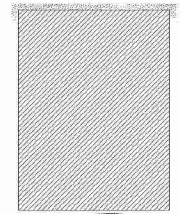


In an online survey of 1,540 professionals certified by the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), the ACSM's results, reported by exercise science expert Walter Thompson, PhD, FACSM, FAACVPR, Regent's Professor at Georgia State University, were both compelling and informative. According to Dr. Thompson, who has supervised the study since its inception three years ago, the fitness industry is moving in a very positive direction when it comes to credibility.

First, he made it clear the difference between a "trend" and a "fad." "Back in 2006, when we first started predicting trends," explains Thompson, "we saw that what was being published as trends were really just fads. For example, a piece of equipment introduced around Christmastime would disappear by January 10<sup>th</sup>!"

So, Thompson decided that it was time to provide some guidance to all four sectors of the industry: the commercial side of the business, community-based programs like the YMCA, corporate fitness/wellness programs and the medical fitness sector. "We felt they needed the right information as to where to place their resources." Further, he and his colleagues conduct this annual survey not only to report trends, but to also serve as an industry watchdog. "In the last 20 minutes that we've been talking," quips Thompson, "you and I could have been certified as a fitness trainer by probably half a dozen online organizations."

Published in *ACSM's Health & Fitness Journal* (November/December 2008; vol 12), here are the survey's results:



- 1. Educated and experienced fitness professionals.** Certification and accreditation for health and fitness programs and professionals are becoming more common.
- 2. Children and obesity.** Fitness programs to address childhood obesity are a top trend for the third year in a row in the ACSM survey.
- 3. Personal training.** Personal trainers are becoming more accessible to more people, according to the survey.
- 4. Strength training.** Men and women are lifting weights; staying strong while aging is increasingly part of their motivation.
- 5. Core training.** This trend is about strengthening muscles in the abdomen and back to stabilize the spine.
- 6. Special fitness programs for older adults.** This trend includes aging baby boomers, frail elders who want to get stronger for daily tasks, active older adults and master athletes.
- 7. Pilates.** Done on a mat or special equipment, Pilates trains the core muscles and improves flexibility and posture.
- 8. Stability ball.** These big, inflatable balls (also called Swiss balls or balance balls) are used for crunches, push-ups and other exercises. Staying stable on the ball is part of the challenge.
- 9. Sport-specific training.** This trend is about athletes training in the off-season to build their strength and endurance.
- 10. Balance training.** In balance training, you might stand on a wobble board or use a stability ball to hone your balance. It's a trend for all ages, Thompson notes.
- 11. Functional fitness.** A functional fitness workout preps your body for daily activities such as running for the bus or lifting groceries— not just gliding along on the elliptical machine.
- 12. Comprehensive health programming at work.** This trend is about improving employees' health and lowering employers' health care costs.
- 13. Wellness coaching.** Wellness coaches support clients in making behavior changes for better wellness.
- 14. Worker incentive programs.** Some employers are giving their workers incentives to make healthy changes.
- 15. Outcome measurements.** This trend is about accountability and measuring progress toward fitness goals.

- 16. Spinning (indoor cycling).** Spinning classes, fast-paced group workouts on stationary bikes, have been around for a while, but they're still going strong.
- 17. Physician referrals.** Doctors are increasingly referring patients to health and fitness facilities, according to the ACSM survey.
- 18. Exercise and weight loss.** Sensible or "sensationalized," most diets now include an exercise component, Thompson notes.
- 19. Group personal training.** Groups of two or three people can often get discounts from personal trainers.
- 20. Reaching new markets.** Thompson estimates that 80 percent of the U.S. public doesn't have an exercise routine or a place to exercise, which amounts to a "huge market" for the health and fitness industry.

"I'm very encouraged, particularly by the fact that the number one trend (stricter certification of personal trainers) has stayed on the top of the list for two years," says Thompson. He explained that a brand new collaboration has started within the fitness industry to address the issue of standardized practices, and such prestigious third-party accreditors like the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) and the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Education Programs (CAAHEP) are on board. In addition, Dr. Thompson is chairing a committee to institute state licensing for personal trainers.

"To date, five or six states are considering licensing personal trainers, and Georgia is one of them. If that happens, I believe everything else will fall into place." The other up-and-coming trend (now 13<sup>th</sup> on the list) that Thompson finds encouraging is wellness coaching. He says it's not just a mind/body/spirit approach like we find in yoga, but also about goal-setting and overcoming obstacles. As for childhood obesity, it is imperative that we address it on every level, from offering parents and kids better exercise and nutritional guidance to restoring structured physical activity in the schools.

After speaking with Dr. Thompson, I feel the fitness industry has grown up and we will soon see far more educated and qualified professionals in every sector of our burgeoning industry. A possible trend not mentioned in this study is free Web TV fitness programming, which may become increasingly popular during these tough economic times. Jas Singh, founder of Slimtree.com and The Broadband Gym, says his vision of "deploying a free, vertically integrated interactive Web TV channel producing best-of-breed digital fitness programming for Internet-based distribution" has been realized. He claims he uses only certified fitness instructors and various experts and has participating audiences throughout the U.S., Canada, UK, India, Australia, Japan, Singapore, and Korea, among others. ■