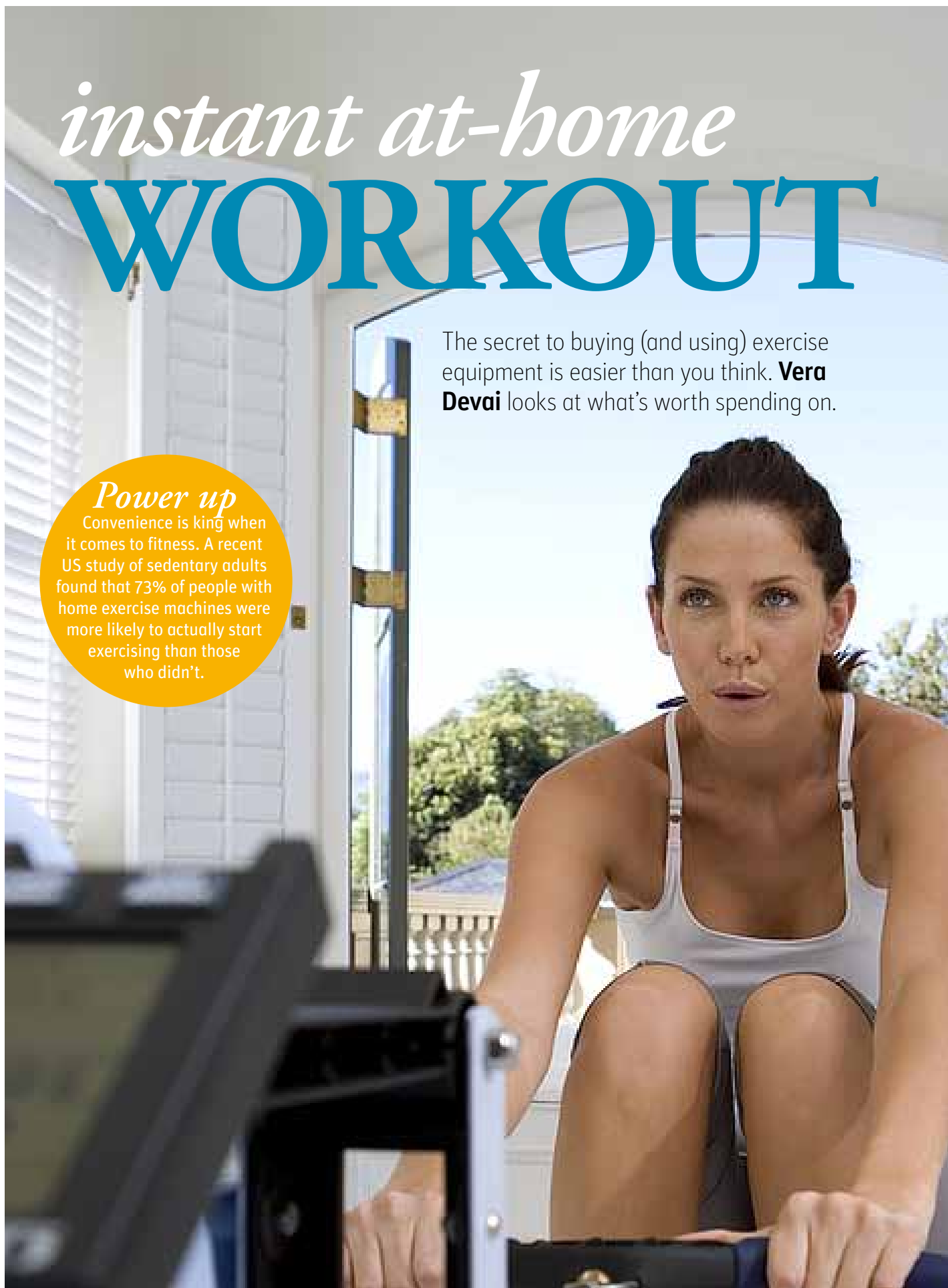


instant at-home **WORKOUT**

The secret to buying (and using) exercise equipment is easier than you think. **Vera Devai** looks at what's worth spending on.

Power up

Convenience is king when it comes to fitness. A recent US study of sedentary adults found that 73% of people with home exercise machines were more likely to actually start exercising than those who didn't.



It might seem like a good idea at the time – you see a piece of exercise equipment on sale and vow to use it and lose those kilos. Now, however, it sits idle in your garage. If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. Approximately \$4 billion is spent each year in America on home exercise gear that ends up gathering dust, according to a report in the *New York Times*, and nearly 40% of people buying home treadmills, bikes and the like admit using them less than expected.

According to *Weight Watchers* magazine fitness editor Martha Lourey-Bird, the key is self-motivation. "You can purchase the best home exercise equipment but it's not going to exercise for you," she says. "You can't buy motivation."

Here's what to look for when making a purchase.

TREADMILLS

PRICE RANGE \$200 – \$20,000

SHOPPING ADVICE When it comes to at-home fitness equipment, you usually get what you pay for. "The price tag is determined by the quality of parts that go into the making," says John Morrison, Workout World national sales manager and personal trainer. Cheaper parts reduce the overall price of the machine but they're usually not very durable and will end up costing more when they need replacing. "Despite what people think, things like suspension don't increase the price much but they do increase user experience considerably. This increases the chance of using it more often and for longer."

Morrison says other things to take into consideration before buying a treadmill include size and noise factors. "The space you have at home is ultimately important but you also need to consider what you really want the machine for – there's no point buying one that fits well if it doesn't meet your demands," he advises. "Keep in mind that most machines fold up to about half their size." Morrison suggests test-riding before you buy. "Machine noise is determined by its weight; the heavier it is, the less it'll vibrate and that reduces noise."

MOTIVATION TIP: "To give you something to look forward to, record your favourite show to watch only while you exercise," says Lourey-Bird. "No exercise, no show!"

BIKES & CROSS TRAINERS

PRICE RANGE Bikes range from \$199 to \$10,000 and cross or elliptical trainers start from \$499 and can go up to \$6000.

SHOPPING ADVICE Morrison says it's important to purchase a bike with a range of inbuilt programs to keep exercise interesting. "Programs are designed to help users achieve goals more quickly and easily. Heart-rate controlled programs, for example, adjust the tension of the bike to control the user's heart rate so they spend all their time in the desired training zone, thus achieving goals faster. The programs are like having your own personal trainer built into the machine – without the ongoing cost."

MOTIVATION TIP: "Listen to music or download a podcast to play while you work out," says Lourey-Bird. "There's no other time in the day to listen to music for pleasure so this is a great way to stay entertained."

WORKOUT DVDS

PRICE RANGE From about \$30 and up

SHOPPING ADVICE Lourey-Bird says it's important to ensure DVDs contain safety advice and instructions, a qualified instructor, variety in workouts and several workouts on one DVD so you get more bang for your buck.

MOTIVATION TIP: Build up your collection and rotate them so you don't get stuck doing the same one repeatedly.

DUMBBELLS & HAND WEIGHTS

PRICE RANGE Hand weights and dumbbells are usually sold by their weight, starting at about \$3 per kilogram.

SHOPPING ADVICE Most dumbbells are pretty similar, according to Morrison, so you should go for what feels most comfortable to hold. A good set of gloves can also help with this, he says. But Morrison suggests purchasing dumbbells you can add or remove weight to. "Having the ability to add weights means you can adjust it to suit your exercises," says Morrison. "There's no use trying to do all your exercises with the same weight. Your muscles and the way you move can make all the difference, so adjusting the weight to keep things challenging, but not too hard, is a great advantage."

Adjustable weights are more economical and will take up less space than having a complete set of different dumbbells.

MOTIVATION TIP: "Because these are portable you can set up a circuit – either inside or out – with different exercise stations for extra variety and challenges," says Lourey-Bird.

PIN-LOADED WEIGHT MACHINES

PRICE RANGE From around \$1000 up to \$10,000

SHOPPING ADVICE "The good thing about pin-loaded machines is that they guide you through the exercise so they're great for beginners," says Morrison. "The important thing to remember is to start off slowly – don't add too much weight too soon." Start off with a lighter weight and get the movement correct before slowly adding more weight.

There's some maintenance involved with this and all types of equipment. "Keeping your equipment clean helps increase its lifespan," says Morrison. "A silicon-based lubricant is the only real tool you need, but always check the user's manual for tips and directions on how to maintain your equipment."

MOTIVATION TIP: To spice things up, change your exercises regularly, say every six weeks, suggests Lourey-Bird. "Try swapping the order or introduce some entirely new exercises into your weights workout. This will help you avoid reaching physical and mental plateaux." WWW