



# Healthy savings

Getting fit for less than the price of joining a gym for a year

**ONLINE**  
If you have more to spend, our other Best Buys include the Bremshey Control T treadmill.  
[www.which.co.uk/reviews/exercise-equipment](http://www.which.co.uk/reviews/exercise-equipment)

**E**ach January, gyms are packed with people trying to work off the extra pounds put on over Christmas. But why pay up to £700 to join a gym for a year when you can get a Best Buy exercise bike for around £250?

We wanted to test whether you could buy a good-quality exercise bike or cross-trainer (sometimes called ellipticals) and save yourself being tied into a gym contract you might not use.

Most of the models tested were easy to use, comfortable, accurate and with a good range of fitness programs, even when they lacked the sophistication of the best gym equipment.

## Buying exercise equipment

Before buying home gym equipment, make sure this kind of training appeals. If you know someone who has a machine, try it to see if it's right for you and see if they've had any problem fitting it in their home. You can also try machines in stores such as John Lewis or sports shops.



Staff will be able to show you the choices and advise which type may suit you. Or visit your local leisure centre gym to see what's available.

## Where to buy

Specialist independents, large chains, some department stores and catalogue stores such as Argos, sell equipment. Also, check manufacturers' websites for stockists. Prices vary a lot, so look online to find the cheapest. If you want to buy online, we recommend trying to see the model in person beforehand.

## The right type for you

The type of machine that is right for you will depend on your age, fitness and your exercise goals. Take into account a machine's weight and space available.

## Exercise bikes

These are a good choice particularly for older, frail or unfit people. The exercise is aimed at the lower body, but still works the heart and lungs and is good for improving endurance and burning fat. They're a good choice if space is limited and are usually light enough to move out of the way.

With upright bikes, you climb on them and adjust the seat so you can't touch the ground. They're quite light and don't take too much space. With recumbent bikes, you lean against a backrest with your legs in front. They're good if you're not confident about climbing on to an upright bike.

Spinning bikes are simple and are designed for high-intensity use, rather than comfort. You can alter the height of the seat and the resistance but they lack other controls.

## Cross/elliptical trainers

These offer a challenging full body workout, combining the motions of a treadmill, stepper and exercise bike forming an elliptical shape. If your arms tire, you can rest them while continuing to work your legs.

You get a low-impact, weight-bearing cardiovascular workout for the upper and lower body, good for losing weight and improving fitness.

They're suited especially to those who have hip, knee, ankle or back pain but aren't suitable if you have balance problems. They allow forward and backward movement which helps muscles develop evenly.

## Checklist

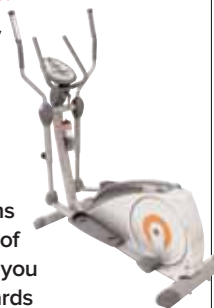
### A good exercise bike has:

- A frame that feels sturdy when cycling
- A comfortable and adjustable seat
- Space between the body and handlebar to make mounting and dismounting easy
- A seat positioned just behind the pedal axle to ensure a good range of motion
- Wide pedals with straps to keep your feet in place
- Sturdy wheels for moving the bike around



### A good cross trainer has:

- A frame that feels sturdy when you're exercising
- Static arms to make it easier to climb on and off
- Enough space between the body and static arms
- Adjustable swinging arms that provide a wide range of movement without pulling you too far forwards or backwards
- Long, adjustable foot platforms
- A smooth elliptical motion with good stride length



## 1 RECUMBENT BIKE

## 81% Tunturi E30R £586

This is the best recumbent bike that we tested and looks every inch the type of kit you would see in the gym.

It's comfortable to use and you can adjust the seat and handlebars to suit your size. Pedalling feels comfortable and the bike responds well when you use the dial control. For example, when you change the resistance (to make pedalling harder or easier), the dial clicks through different levels, so it's clear how many levels you've altered.

There's a good choice of pre-set programs and you can change their length and intensity. Assembly instructions are picture-based but could be clearer about the order to carry out the steps in.

We found the Tunturi cheapest at Powerhouse Fitness. Prices at other shops average around £650.

**WE LIKE** The warranty includes a 15-year guarantee for its frame and three years for other components.

**Available** Powerhouse Fitness, Fitness Superstore, widely online **Display power** Mains **Folds for storage** No **Display feedback** Time, speed, distance, program profile, calories, pulse rate, RPM, target heart rate, room temperature



## 4 UPRIGHT BIKE

## 81% York Fitness Anniversary C201 £175

This great-value bike offers plenty of training programs, including hill climb, fat burn and cross country displayed on graphs showing the type of challenge.

You can vary how intense a workout is, but the minimum and maximum resistance levels are higher than the other machines, which may make it more suited to fitter people, rather than beginners.

The seat adjusts vertically and horizontally and you can move the handlebars up and down.

A towel holder is a nice touch. The bike feels comfortable with soft, smooth handgrips and a sturdy seat. If you have large feet, you might find they get caught occasionally on the small pedals.

The guarantee covers the frame for a lifetime, plus two years' parts and labour for other parts. It's easy to set up and use and there are clear instructions to help. We found it cheapest on the Amazon website.

**WE FOUND** This is the lightest bike tested so a good option if you want to move it between exercise sessions.

**Available** Independents nationwide or at the York Fitness factory store. Widely available online. **Display power** Mains **Folds for storage** No **Display feedback** Time, speed, distance, program profile, calories, pulse rate, RPM, target heart rate



## 5 UPRIGHT BIKE

## 77% Roger Black Gold Bike £250

This bike has 23 programs with names such as valley and precipice, and heart-rate options to keep the more experienced exerciser challenged.

There's plenty for the beginner to work with too, as the bike's easy to use with simple program selection: just turn the dial on the display. There are several resistance levels, but the minimum and maximum levels are low compared with other machines.

Those starting out to get fit will like this, but people who are a bit more experienced may not be pushed as hard as they're used to.

The bike's comfortable to use, and you can adjust the

seat vertically and horizontally. The flywheel is higher than other bikes which makes mounting and dismounting more of a challenge: this may be a problem if you have limited mobility.

We found that there were some discrepancies between the parts provided and the assembly instructions, but there were helpful suggestions too.

The bike is covered by a two-year warranty and is available from Argos.

As we went to press, it was on special offer at £149.

**WE FOUND** On heart-rate target programs, the display flashes 'hurry up' or 'slow down' to keep you on track.

**Available** Argos **Display power** Mains **Folds for storage** No **Display feedback** Time, distance, speed, calories, pulse rate, RPM, target heart rate, age, target heart rate, program profile.



## 8 CROSS-TRAINER

## 76% York Fitness Diamond X302 £429

The Diamond shone in our tests with a range of strong features that help it stand out from the crowd.

It's the only cross-trainer tested which has heart-rate sensors on the moving arms, not the static ones. This means you can keep working your upper arms as it takes your heart rate.

Cross-trainers are generally large, but this is quite compact, particularly in length. It's comfortable to use, with a good, smooth range of motion. You can adjust the foot platform position to fit you best.

The display is clear but a little low. The screen is packed with feedback about your exercise: it may seem busy at first, but the instructions are easy to follow.

It has plenty of programs and options – you can set up a user profile with information about your age, sex, height and weight.

There's also a fitness test which measures how well you recover after exercise, based on your heart-rate data.

There's a water bottle, too, which adds to the gym-like impression that this machine exudes. We found it cheapest at Fitness Superstore.

**WORTH KNOWING** It will take two people to put the machine together.

**Available** Independents nationwide, online **Display power** Mains **Folds for storage** No **Display feedback** Time, distance, speed, program profile, calories, pulse rate, RPM, body fat, watts, bmi



## Heart-rate monitors

These help map how well your fitness program is going and ensure you exercise safely. They cost from £15 to more than £200. We tested five that cost less than £100. We tested accuracy and

rated how comfortable and easy to use they are. We haven't given total test scores, as your choice will depend on what you hope to achieve. See [www.which.co.uk/heart-rate-monitors](http://www.which.co.uk/heart-rate-monitors) for more.



### NIKE TRIAX C6 £90

This was our favourite watch. It's great for beginners as it's easy to use, with instructions and a

helpful CD Rom. There are plenty of programs to keep advanced users happy. The easy-to-read display shows heart rate and calories burned, plus training zone data which shows when you're exercising

at the right level. It can display heart rate data on a graph.

**Lap function** No **Computer downloads** No **Stopwatch** Yes **Instructions** ★★★★★ **Setting the HRM** ★★★★★ **Comfort** ★★★★★

**POLAR F6M £70** Polar is the brand leader in monitors and has a lot to choose from (including one for horses). Fans of statistics will like the F6M as you can download exercise data to a computer. There are plenty of features. Beginners may find it a bit overwhelming as it's more complex than other monitors tested. You can display



heart rate as an average, as beats per minute as a percentage of your maximum and at peak.

You can display calories used and set training zones, with alerts.

**Lap function** No **Computer downloads** Yes **Stopwatch** Yes **Instructions** ★★★ **Setting the HRM** ★★★★★ **Comfort** ★★★★★



### TIMEX T5G941 £35

The cheapest monitor tested keeps things simple, making it good for beginners. The easy-to-read display shows

beats per minute and average heart rate but there isn't a training zone function or calorie data. Advanced users might dislike the lack of training features. We found erratic values during a runner's rest

phase, varying up to 11 beats a minute from the ECG reading.

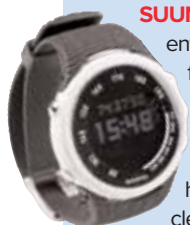
**Lap function** No **Computer downloads** No **Stopwatch** No **Instructions** ★★★ **Setting the HRM** ★★★★★ **Comfort** ★★★★★

**YORK FITNESS P10 £50** This is easy to use and has a good feature range. There's a training zone option and heart rate can be shown as beats per minute, or average, minimum and maximum or percentage of maximum readings. The



display is hard to read quickly and doesn't show calories used. We found the buttons unpleasant to touch. Unusually, there isn't a clock alarm.

**Lap function** No **Computer downloads** No **Stopwatch** No **Instructions** ★★★ **Setting the HRM** ★★★★★ **Comfort** ★★★★★



### SUUNTO T1C £65

This entry-level product from Suunto (specialists in monitors) still packs lots of features. The heart-rate display is clear, though

stopwatch data is small. It's good for zonal training and is designed with runners in mind. You can record data for up to 30 laps. Our testers said the chest strap must be carefully positioned as its large sensor unit can become uncomfortable,

especially for women. In our accuracy test, we noted rogue readings that may be due to occasional signal loss.

**Lap function** Yes **Computer downloads** No **Stopwatch** Yes **Instructions** ★★★ **Setting the HRM** ★★★★★ **Comfort** ★★★

## Training tips

### Ideas on warming up, exercising and how to keep going

If you're unfit or have a medical condition, consult your doctor before starting. Without expert instruction and the tailored exercise plan you can get in a gym, you may not use apparatus correctly. Follow instructions. Wear loose fitting, comfortable clothing.

### WARMING UP AND WARMING DOWN

Start with a three- to six-minute warm up, depending on how fit you are, to

MODEL	PRICE (£)
<b>RECUMBENT BIKES</b>	
1 <b>TUNTURI E30R</b>	586
2 <b>HORIZON FITNESS</b> Comfort 408	416
3 <b>BREMSHEY</b> Cardio comfort control	425
<b>UPRIGHT BIKES</b>	
4 <b>YORK FITNESS</b> Anniversary c201	175
5 <b>ROGER BLACK</b> Gold bike	250
6 <b>BREMSHEY SPORT</b> Cardio pacer	225
7 <b>VISION FITNESS</b> E3100	599
<b>CROSS-TRAINERS</b>	
8 <b>YORK FITNESS</b> Diamond X302	429
9 <b>TUNTURI</b> CF30 16"	550
10 <b>BREMSHEY</b> Orbit pacer 16R	390
11 <b>V-FIT</b> 07PME	224
12 <b>REEBOK</b> i-trainer	200
13 <b>MOTIVE FITNESS</b> X1 Manual Magnetic	449
14 <b>HORIZON FITNESS</b> Andes 007 Elliptical	380

a Not possible to test on this machine

### USING THE TABLE

The more stars the better.

### Specification

**Price** See p47. **Size** Height, width and length measured when the equipment is ready to use. **Programs** The number of program options possible.

### Test performance

**Durability** How well a machine did in

## Contacts

**Bremshey**  
0115 982 2844  
[www.bremshey.de](http://www.bremshey.de)  
**Horizon Fitness**  
01782 644900  
[www.horizonfitness.co.uk](http://www.horizonfitness.co.uk)

**Motive Fitness**  
0871 222 0881  
[www.benysports.co.uk](http://www.benysports.co.uk)  
**Reebok** 01908 512244  
[www.reebokfitness.co.uk](http://www.reebokfitness.co.uk)  
**Roger Black** 0845 640 0800

[www.argos.co.uk/rogerblack](http://www.argos.co.uk/rogerblack)  
**Tunturi**  
0115 982 2844  
[www.tunturi.com](http://www.tunturi.com)  
**V-Fit**  
0871 222 0881  
[www.benysports.co.uk](http://www.benysports.co.uk)  
**Vision Fitness**  
01782 644900  
[www.visionfitness.com](http://www.visionfitness.com)  
**York Fitness**  
01327 701 852  
[www.yorkfitness.com](http://www.yorkfitness.com)

gradually increase breathing and heart rates and body temperature. Once you're at the right level, keep it up for as long as you want before cooling down by slowly decreasing the intensity of exercise to return heart rate and breathing to normal. Stretch the muscle groups you've been using for three to six minutes.

**BUILD GRADUALLY** Aim to build to at least 30 minutes moderately intense activity on at least five days a week. Don't increase time or intensity more than 10% a week.

**MAKING PROGRESS** You progress by changing the intensity of a training session. There are two main ways to do this.

Firstly, choose programs which include periods of high resistance. Selecting programs that involve such periods of exercise ensures that you need to push harder to keep momentum.

Secondly, combine tough program patterns with higher levels of difficulty. For example, select a hill program which will vary the

resistance levels according to a pre-defined pattern. You can dictate how difficult the hill will be by choosing a higher overall resistance level.

#### **DON'T FEEL GUILTY**

Don't feel guilty if you miss a session. A little exercise is better than none and you can build it up again gradually. But don't leave the gap too long. It can take just two weeks to lose fitness if you stop and about three times as long to regain it.

#### **MONITOR YOUR PROGRESS**

Keep an exercise diary to see how you progress. Record how long you exercised for, program used, intensity level and statistics such as calories burned and heart rate.

#### **SMALL TARGETS**

Set small targets to help you improve. For example, aim to add five minutes extra to your next workout, or try a higher resistance level on a favourite program.

#### **REFRESH YOURSELF**

Keep water and a towel handy.

SPECIFICATION				WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE							SCORE %
MAXIMUM USER WEIGHT (kg)	SIZE (cm) (h x w x d)	WEIGHT (kg)	PROGRAMS	DURABILITY	ACCURACY	RESISTANCE RANGE	INTEREST FACTOR	EASE OF PROGRAMMING	ASSEMBLY	COMFORT	
135	121x70x175	59	21	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a <sup>a</sup>	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	81
125	131x63x168	50	8	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	74
135	126x68x164	51	16	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★★	71
125	147x56x95	27	19	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	81
110	146x50x107	33	23	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	77
135	141x54x108	34	16	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	74
n/s	140x65x110	47	5	★★★	★★★★	★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★	62
150	156x67x155	58	22	★★★★★	★★★★★	n/a <sup>a</sup>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	76
150	162x66x168	62	21	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★★	72
135	164x66x156	60	16	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★★	69
120	170x61x141	41	17	★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★★★	72
120	162x58x139	52	4	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★★★	59
130	173x71x175	61	4	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	★★	★★★	★	★★★★	49
113	166x66x187	56	10	★★★	n/a <sup>a</sup>	★★★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★	49

our durability testing. **Accuracy** We checked if stated speeds shown on display panels were accurate. The Horizon Fitness cross-trainer (14) doesn't display speed.

**Resistance range** We measured how much force is needed to operate the equipment at zero, maximum and 75% of maximum resistance levels. The higher the

stars, the wider the range between minimum and maximum resistance. Minimum or maximum can be low or high. See online for details. This rating doesn't contribute to the total score as it's a matter of user preference.

**Boredom factor** Our experts rate the range of programs and resistance levels and the

perceived long-term interest the machine will present. **Ease of programming** How easy it is to set programs for your workout.

**Assembly** Based on our experience of assembling each machine according to instructions supplied. **Comfort** Our testers' verdicts on how comfortable (per type) each machine was to use.

Points would be lost if there was a small range of motion, or seats didn't feel comfortable.

#### **Score**

Ignores price and is based on:

Ease of use	30%
Build quality	25%
Versatility	25%
Accuracy	20%