



Does Personal Training Increase Member Retention?



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In this report from the TRP 10,000™ study, we examine which members purchased Personal Training (PT), what their main reasons were for purchasing PT and how PT is associated with visit frequency, reported progress and membership retention.

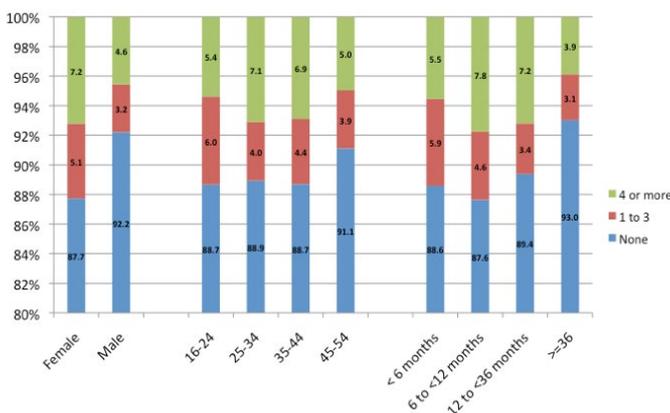
Data and analysis

Members were asked how many PT sessions they had purchased in the last 3 months with possible answers ranging from 'None' to '12 or more'. Members that purchased at least one PT session were asked what the main reason was for purchasing PT selecting from four possible options or an 'other' category. Members were followed up for 7 months at which point it was recorded whether they had cancelled or not.

Who receives PT?

Overall 10% of members reported purchasing at least 1 session of PT in the 3 months prior to the survey. Four percent reported purchasing 1-3 sessions and 6% purchased 4 or more sessions. Figure 1 shows how many sessions of PT members have purchased by gender, age group and length of membership. Females were more likely to purchase PT than males as were members aged 25-44 years compared to younger and older members. Mid-term members (6-36 months since joining) were most likely to purchase regular sessions of PT compared to new members or longstanding members who were least likely to have purchased PT.

Figure 1. Number of PT sessions purchased by sex, age group and length of membership (in months).



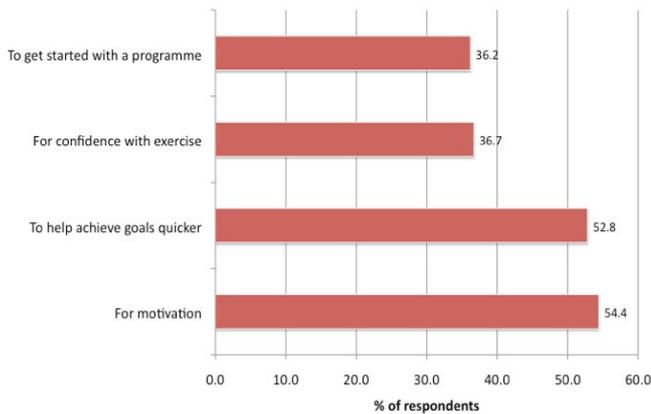
Why do people purchase PT?

The primary reasons for purchasing PT are shown in Figure 2 (overleaf). Just over half of the members who purchased at least 1 session of PT said that motivation and assistance with achieving goals more quickly were the main reasons for purchasing PT (multiple answers were allowed). A lower proportion of members reported that they purchased PT to help with exercise confidence (36.7%) and to get started with a programme (36.2%). Other reasons given by a small number of members included 'help with a rehabilitation programme', 'training for a specific event' and 'help with weight loss'. Females were a little more likely to say they purchased PT for motivation than males (57% vs 50%) with little difference between age groups and length of membership. The youngest age group was most likely to say they purchased PT to help them achieve goals quicker and the oldest group the least likely (63% vs 43%). Similarly a higher proportion of the youngest members said they purchased PT to increase their confidence for exercise compared to older members (43% vs 34%). There was little difference in gender, age and length of membership in the proportion of members who purchased PT to get started with a programme apart from members age 35-44 years who were least likely to say this (29%).



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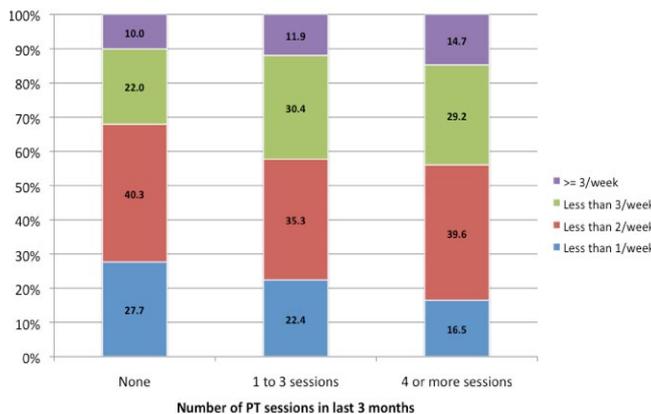
Figure 2. Proportion of members reporting main reasons for purchasing PT



Is PT associated with visit frequency?

The level of PT sessions purchased is positively associated with regular club visits (Figure 3). In addition, regular PT is associated with a much lower level of non-attendance. On average members who purchased 4 or more sessions of PT in the last 3 months averaged 1.4 more club visits a month than members who did not purchase PT.

Figure 3. Level of visit frequency by level of PT

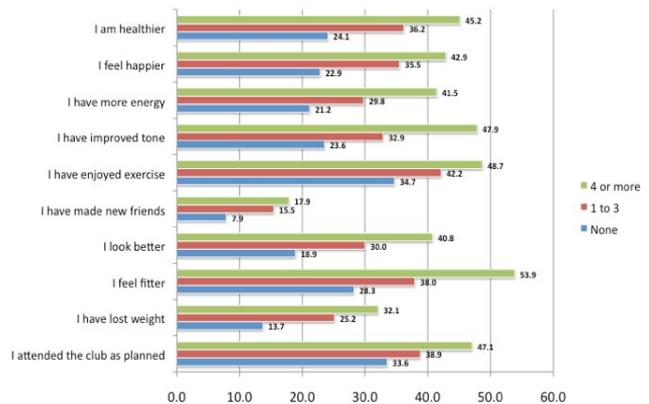


Do members who receive PT report greater progress?

Compared to members who do not purchase PT, members who do purchase PT report higher levels of progress in all areas that they were asked about (Figure 4). Not only was this true for physical outcomes such as fitness and weight loss but also for social outcomes and the enjoyment of exercise. PT members were also more likely to report that they had attended the club as frequently as planned compared to non-PT members. When considered all together the two measures of progress most strongly

associated with regular PT was weight loss and making new friends. It is not clear whether the latter relates to a friendship with the trainer or another club member.

Figure 4. The proportion of members reporting progress in the last 3 months by level of PT



Does PT increase member retention?

Figure 5 shows that a higher proportion of members retain their membership over 7 months of follow up if they have regular PT sessions compared to members who do not purchase any PT. However, despite reporting greater progress than non-PT members, members who have only an occasional session of PT have a lower retention rate than members who do not purchase any PT. This observation is reiterated in Figure 6 (also overleaf) that shows the rate of cancellation by level of PT. For every 1,000 members, 6 fewer cancel each month if they have regularly purchased PT in the last 3 months compared to members who have not done so. By contrast there is an excess of 6 cancellations per 1,000 members each month in members who have the occasional session of PT compared to members who have no sessions. It maybe that some members who are not making much progress try PT as a last resort with unrealistic expectations for quick results. When results don't come within a couple of sessions they give up all together.

It is possible that the beneficial effect of PT is due to increased interaction with fitness staff that we already know reduces the risk of cancelling. It is also possible that the reduced risk of cancelling associated with PT is due to the higher visit frequency that PT purchasers have. However, when we test these possibilities statistically, regular PT is associated with a 30% reduction in the risk of cancelling during the follow up period compared to no PT sessions and this reduction is not due to fitness staff interactions or visit frequency. All three things reduce the risk of cancelling.



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Figure 5. Retention rate after 7 months of purchased PT sessions

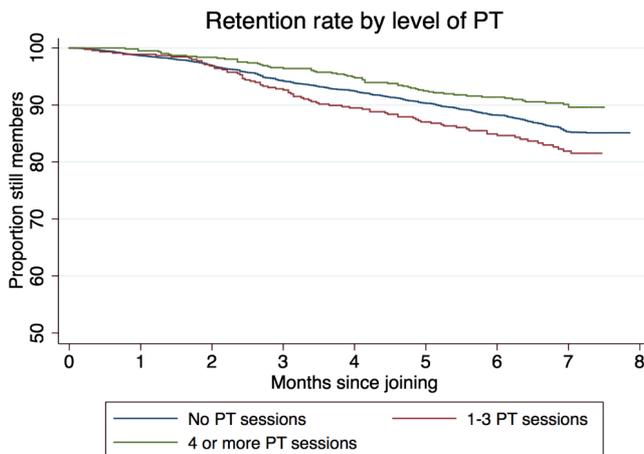
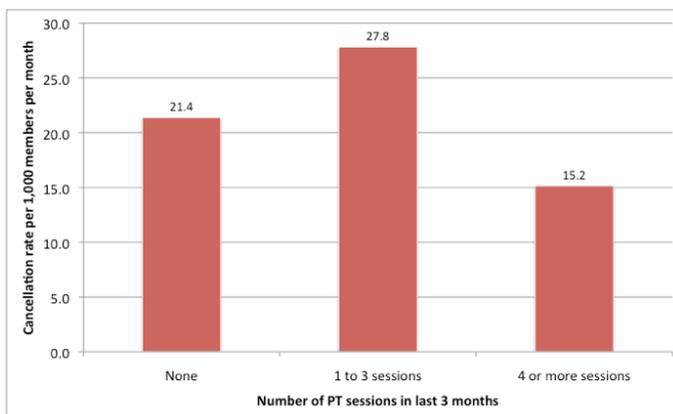


Figure 6. Rate of cancellation (per 1,000 members per month) by level of PT purchased in last 3 months



Summary

One in ten members say they have purchased at least one session of PT in the 3 months prior to the TRP 10,000™ survey with approximately 1 in 17 purchasing regular sessions of PT. The main reasons for purchasing PT are for help with motivation and achieving goals quicker. Members who purchase PT regularly attend their club a little more than members who do not and are much less likely to be non-attenders.

Regular PT is associated with greater progress in a wide range of areas both physical and social. The greatest difference in progress between regular PT members and non-PT members is weight loss and making a friend. We have previously reported that progress with personal goals is one of the keys to improved retention.

Regular PT is associated with higher membership retention and a reduced risk of cancelling each month. This improved retention is not explained by higher visit frequency or better

staff interaction both of which are independently associated with retention. Perhaps a little surprisingly, members who report just 1 or 2 sessions of PT have a higher cancellation rate than members who do not purchase PT. Not continuing with PT may indicate greater struggles with motivation or perhaps unrealistic expectations about what PT may offer – a quick fix for results. Whatever the reason, members who try PT but don't continue should be treated as at risk for premature cancellation. It is important for PTs to understand this extra risk. Firstly, they should make sure they understand client expectations for PT and manage them if unrealistic. Secondly they need to ensure the first PT session (including taster sessions) reflects member expectations and is sufficiently enjoyable/rewarding that the member wants to repeat the experience. If clubs observe that significant numbers of members who try PT do not continue then they quickly need to review the service to avoid an increase in attrition. Is the service high quality delivered by skilled trainers or just a just another gym session with one of the existing fitness staff rebadged as a PT?

Despite the many benefits associated with PT, including a secondary income stream for clubs, take up is very low with just 6% of members reporting 4 or more sessions in the 3 months prior to the survey and only 2% reporting the equivalent of 1 session a week. Therefore there is considerable scope to increase PT penetration rates that would greatly increase the number of members who meet their goals that in turn would increase longevity and the level of member income. If all members purchased the equivalent of 4 or more PT sessions in a 12-week period then we estimate that 29% of observed cancellations would be avoided. Based on the results reported here clubs can confidently advertise that regular PT is associated with progress in a wide range of areas including fitness, weight loss and the enjoyment of exercise.

Recommendations

- Ensure PT sessions are high quality – if people try them and give up after a few sessions, the risk of cancellation increases.
- Ensure expectations of PT are managed appropriately – if members try PT and find their expectations are not met and so give up after a few sessions, the risk of cancelling increases.
- Taster sessions – giving away taster sessions could more than pay for itself as long as sessions are good enough to get members hooked.
- Discount PT packages for more regular sessions to ensure members create a PT habit.
- Offer discounts or incentives for completing a certain number of sessions in a set time period.
- Promote multiple benefits of PT.





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