

Online Virtual PT sessions

How to manage and reduce risks



In recent years, with the continual growth in social media, online fitness options have grown dramatically. And now with restrictions on how and where people can exercise due to COVID-19 this demand is increasing.

Offering personal training sessions in a virtual online manner is a fantastic idea. It means clients can conveniently keep exercising at a time when people have more limitations. It also means personal trainers can keep their business operating and bringing in an income. However, running a personal training business online isn't the same as running one where you're physically present, and this means there are new challenges and risks which need to be managed. While some of what has always been expected of you will stay the same, there will be some additional requirements and considerations.

Meeting your requirements

As a personal trainer, there are professional obligations you need to meet, regardless of how you're operating your business. When running virtual online PT sessions, you need to be sure you're still complying with Fitness Australia's Code of Ethics and Scope of Practice for Australian Registered Exercise Professionals. Also, all online virtual training needs to adhere to Fitness Australia's [Online Virtual Personal Training](#) recommendations.

You also need to be sure you're keeping up to date and complying with the COVID-19 restrictions put in place by Federal, State and Local governments. Restrictions are changing frequently, and each State and Territory may vary, so it's imperative fitness providers remain aware of their requirements.

Client selection

Online personal training sessions won't suit all clients. Therefore, your process for selecting clients who you'll train in this manner is very important.

Firstly, all clients should complete the Australian adult pre-exercise screening system tool which can be accessed via Fitness Australia's website (<https://fitness.org.au/apss>). Fitness Australia recommends that only those clients who are determined to be low risk should be trained online; the challenges of managing high risk clients remotely is too great. Online training may also not be suitable for clients who are new to personal training and the types of exercises you'll be prescribing, so you'll want to find out a bit about their exercise history.

You need to be sure the client has the equipment and space necessary to undergo online virtual training, beyond the obvious of having the necessary technology to connect and a reliable internet connection. You'll

need to discuss devices with them. The small screen of a phone is most likely not going to be suitable, particularly when you want them to see you demonstrating the correct technique. A laptop or tablet would be more ideal.

You also need to discuss the location where the client will be using, given many won't be designed for fitness sessions, and assist them to do a risk assessment of that location to be sure it's safe and ideal. This requires considering the physical layout of the premises such as furniture and flooring, but also other potential distractions and risks such as children or pets being present. You need to work with each client and their set up to make it as safe as possible. If you don't think it's safe, you need to reconsider if you'll train them in this manner.

Program development

As a personal trainer, your program development and exercise selection are always incredibly important to ensure the program is suitable for that individual client and their goals and expectations. When creating an online training program, there are additional factors which need to be considered.

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You need to be sure you're still having regular conversations with the client to understand what they want to achieve with their training and how they're progressing with the program over time. Given it will be harder for you to observe how the client is going with their training, you may want to set up additional times to talk.

When selecting exercises, keep in mind that it's going to be challenging to demonstrate the correct technique as well as check the technique of the client. Therefore, it's worth considering selecting exercises which are less challenging from a technique perspective and easier to explain. For inexperienced clients, exercises which have a high injury rate when performed incorrectly, such as deadlifts, might be best to avoid. During a virtual online session, you'll need to be sure you can see what the client is doing so you can check and correct their technique. So, when setting the exercises, plan how you want the client to be positioned so you're able to watch them. Also, be prepared to spend more time than usual explaining exercises and you may have to repeat yourself a few times.

When developing the program, you need to decide what you'll charge the client; your usual fees may change for an online program. Always be sure you're upfront and clear with clients regarding fees; having this information in writing will assist this.

Record keeping

It's important that personal trainers keep detailed records of their training sessions with clients, whether they're done in person or online. These records mean trainers don't need to rely on their memory to know what the client did in previous sessions and provides evidence of the client's progression. Unfortunately, Guild's experience in managing claims against personal trainers has shown that many trainers keep minimal records.

Be sure when conducting online training sessions, you're taking notes which include, but isn't limited to:

- > Exercises performed (include sets, reps, weights etc)
- > Difficulty the client experienced with the exercises
- > Pain, discomfort or injuries experienced
- > Exercise prescribed for the client to undertake in their own time
- > Referrals, such as to a health or allied health practitioner

Privacy

You have a professional obligation to take reasonable and appropriate steps to protect the privacy and confidentiality of your clients. Therefore, when conducting an online training session, be sure it's

done in a private setting where no one in the background can hear or see what's happening. Many forms of online communication, such as video conferences, have a recording function. Training sessions shouldn't be recorded simply because they can. They should only be recorded if there's an identified need for it and if the client has given their consent.

What to do in the case of an emergency?

While it may not seem likely, you need to be prepared and have a plan for what you'll do if your client experiences an incident or emergency during one of your sessions.

All incidents, even the small ones, need an incident form completed. This acts as the history and record of what happened and your response to it. You also need to think about how you'll assess the severity of the incident given you aren't there. If the client is injured, it's best to err on the side of caution and recommend they seek medical attention even if they don't think it's necessary. If the client is severely injured, you may need to call an ambulance for them. To be able to seek the assistance they may need, you should be sure you know the address of where they're exercising.



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