



CONTRIBUTING WRITER

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HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR GYM MEMBERSHIP

Joining a gym, no matter what time of year it is, can be an intimidating endeavor. Joining the wrong gym can be a costly mistake, but joining the right gym can result in many positive mental, social, and physical outcomes. Exercise has been shown to improve mild to moderate depression, improve body composition, decrease stress, and manage a multitude of blood markers (cholesterol, A1C, etc.). Exercise will also reduce your risk of falls and pain and allow you to remain active throughout your life.

While you're looking for the right gym for you and getting started with regular exercise, ask yourself these questions to help you make the right choice and maintain your new, healthier lifestyle:

DOES IT FIT YOUR AVAILABILITY? You are more likely to utilize the facility if it is located close to home, within 15 minutes if possible. Look for places that have hours that accommodate your work and home schedule. Some facilities will allow a one week to a one month trial, which is a great way to know if it's the right fit for you. If you are able to get a trial membership go at different times to observe how crowded the gym is at those times. What are your short- and long-term goals? Going regularly will make the most of your investment, so having a goal in mind will help you adjust to your new routine and maintain your long-term motivation. If a gym costs 30 dollars a month, but you only go once a week, each gym session will be seen as a high price per service. If you go more regularly, the investment will be much more manageable—even as little as a dollar a day.

DO THEY HAVE THE EQUIPMENT YOU NEED? Once you have a goal written down, what you need to achieve success will be evident. Ensure the facility has your equipment needs, but remember: no piece of equipment is necessarily the one reason you should join or not join a facility. If you're concerned with a missing piece of equipment, ask the facility for ideas on modification or using a similar piece of equipment.

WHAT EXTRAS DO THEY OFFER? You may enjoy working out alone, but in the future you may want to try working out with other people. A group

environment can keep you motivated, or a personal trainer may help you attain a goal that you might be struggling to attain on your own.

WILL THEY GIVE YOU THE EDUCATION YOU NEED? Most facilities will provide a free introduction to the gym or a free trial with a personal trainer to help you learn how to use the equipment properly and safely.

ARE YOU PREPPING RIGHT FOR EACH WORKOUT? Before you get to the gym, are you giving your body the energy that it needs for this workout? To help boost your energy beforehand, make sure you're hydrating and getting the proper nutrition you need. Are you doing the right workouts? Most people need resistance exercise to meet their goals. Research shows that the best form of exercise for weight loss is resistance exercise, and the aging process naturally results in lost muscle mass and strength. Try adding weights into your routine to stave off the negative effects of weight gain, weakness, and loss of balance, while allowing you to continue with the activities that are important to your life.

HAVE YOU SHARED YOUR GOALS WITH ANYONE ELSE? There are many benefits to sharing your wellness goals with others. Tell your insurance company, because some insurance companies will have health insurance credit for regular attendance. Tell your friends to keep you motivated and to celebrate with you when you achieve your goals. If you're having trouble—have you spoken to your doctor or physical therapist about it? Speak with your doctor regarding any concerns you might have before starting or continuing to exercise. If you have a personal trainer, connect them to your doctor or physical therapist so they can share goals and potential limitations.

AND MOST IMPORTANTLY—ARE YOU HAVING FUN YET? If you're not enjoying your time at the gym, you are unlikely to continue going. Not sure how to make it fun? Try integrating all forms of exercise and change up your routine. Reward yourself. Go without headphones for a day. Try a different time of day. Get help from a personal trainer, group class, or a physical therapist.