

Choosing the Right Gym

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How does one actually get into better shape? Do you really have to join a gym? The answer is no. There are some people who successfully exercise and motivate themselves. But, if you're like most Americans, you'll be one of 8 to 9 out of 10 who buy home exercise equipment and never end up using it. Motivation and knowledge are the two biggest factors in determining one's success. These are also the two biggest reasons to join a gym.



Nothing can motivate you like a gym with great service and a high-energy atmosphere. You get off work and you're beat. The last thing you want to do is cardio or lift some weight. But, you get to the gym because it's right on your way home from work. You walk through the door and the music starts to wake you up. Christy, who is usually at the front desk in the evening, greets you at the door by name with a big smile. You make your way to the locker room stopping briefly to say hi to some people who you've gotten to know while working out over the last few weeks. Once you're dressed, you make your way over to the treadmill to warm up. Once on the treadmill you can't help but become motivated by the environment. Now you're wide-awake and ready to get one step closer to your goals. While you're working out a staff member notices you're doing triceps pushdowns incorrectly and shows you the right way to perform them. On your way out of the gym, after a great workout, Christy says, "have a great evening."

What do you think would happen if you worked out at home? You get off work and you're beat. You pull into your drive way, get out of your car, and open the door to a quiet home. You put some comfortable close on, grab something to eat and sit on the couch to watch some news. The next thing you know you wake up with the TV clicker in your hand and it's 9:30; time to go to bed. And this example doesn't take having kids into account.



So how do you choose the gym that's right for you? First and for most, never join on the first day. As a matter of fact, let the staff know before the tour begins, you are not joining today and will not tolerate any high-pressure sales. If a gym you visit uses high-pressure tactics, they are not a service-orientated center. A gym that offers impeccable service does not have to resort to vacuum cleaner type sales.

When you walk into a gym, look for a good impression. One of the staff should come out from behind the front desk and greet you with a smile. You should feel welcome upon arrival. If you walk into a club that's playing heavy metal music, and a 250lb guy with a bad tan wearing a string tank top with tattoos greets you by saying "what's up?" unless you are a meat-head, this is not the place for you. Depending on what you expect in a club, can be the difference between taking a tour and not taking a tour of a particular gym.

While you are being toured by a staff member there are a few things one should pay attention to. What's the vibe like? Is it more like a nightclub, or more of an adult high-energy club? Pay attention to the type of clientele that is present. Is the gym predominantly female, or are there some hardcore lifters? Although they can be intimidating, hardcore lifters can be a big asset to a gym. Many of them will be glad to give you a spot or give you some advice when asked. If the management does their job, intimidating, inconsiderate individuals will not be welcome.

As you walk through take an inventory of the equipment. Is there a large selection of cardio equipment? What about selectorized equipment? This is the type of equipment that has a weight stack attached to it. You can change the amount of weight on this type of equipment simply by moving a pin. There should be enough pieces of selectorized equipment to work every body part. How does the equipment look? Does the padding look good, or is it torn and repaired with duct tape? Make sure everything looks maintained and clean.



Are there any pieces that have a sign saying “out of order” on them? Ask the person giving you the tour how long they’ve been out of order. If he says a month, this is not a well-maintained facility. A gym that has machines out of order for an extended period of time either has an owner who doesn’t care or is in financial difficulty.

How does the free weight area look? Are the weights and bars put away if not in use? Does the floor look dusty and dirty, or does it look like it gets cleaned daily? Is there enough space to freely walk around the workout areas?

Venture into the locker room and bathrooms while on your tour. Bad looking showers, toilets and sinks are dead giveaways for a poor maintained facility. If it looks gross, you may want to go elsewhere.



Once the tour is over inquire about a trial membership with a free orientation to get you started on a simple program if needed. If a club does not offer a trial membership, or it only offers a day pass, you might want to think twice about spending your money there. A gym that is confident in what they have to offer will have at least a “seven day” trial membership. Some facilities even offer a “thirty day” trial membership. A gym that offers trial memberships without any purchase is very confident with its staff and the services they offer. They feel if they can get you to experience their club, you’ll be impressed and feel comfortable enough to purchase a membership.



A trial membership is a good way to see first hand what the club is like and what it has to offer. You’ll be able to go at different times to see if it’s ever too crowded. Does the club smell? Is it always clean and maintained at different times on different days? This is also a great way to see how the staff operates. Pay attention to the staff from the moment you enter the club to the moment you leave. During a trial membership is the best way to see if a particular gym is the place you really want to be.

When visiting the gyms in your area, take the list below to each one you visit. Keep in mind, different gyms offer different services. You need to visit all the facilities within a 10 – 20 minute drive from home or work. Once you compile a list for each center, you now can make an accurate comparison between them. Visiting different facilities will also help you to find what aspects of a gym are most important to you. Below you’ll find a list of things a gym may have:

- Close to home or work
- Convenient hours
- The right atmosphere
- Good Lighting
- Friendly helpful staff
- Cleanliness

- Well maintained locker and shower areas
- Personal training
- Orientation for new members (free training session)
- Good selection of equipment
- Adequate amount of equipment during busy hours
- Well maintained equipment
- Adequate parking
- Shake & coffee bar
- Age limits (are kids or teens allowed)
- Classes (cardio kick boxing, etc.) free or fee
- Child care, free or fee
- Free trial membership
- Policies and procedures in writing
- Enrollment fee (affordable, expensive, none)
- Hard-core sales tactics (yes, no)
- Sauna
- Pool
- Steam room
- Massage

Now that you've made an inventory of what each gym offers, you need to decide which gym satisfies your needs the most. Just remember it's not the size of the facility. Bigger doesn't mean better. Many smaller gyms do not offer as much as a larger gym, but they can specialize and do it better than anyone in the area. Do not price shop if you don't need to. A gym that offers impeccable service is not going to be the cheapest. How can you have the best facility, the best staff, the best equipment, and be the cheapest in town? It doesn't work that way.

With the information provided in this article you'll be armed to make a good decision. If you still feel intimidated when visiting the facilities in your area, don't fret. Feeling intimidated is a normal response to going into any new situation. At least you can rest assured you'll know what to look for in a facility. And once you pick the facility that's right for you, in a short period you'll feel like one of the family.