



GYM 101

Want to join a gym but not sure where to start? Or you're a gym user bored with the treadmill? Fitness editor Martha Lourey-Bird looks at getting the most out of gyms

The right gym for you

If you're looking to join a gym, there are key things to consider. Your gym should be near home or work, or you'll never go. It should be filled with the type of people – both staff and members – that you feel comfortable around, and it should offer classes you'll actually do, so check out a timetable. Staff should be appropriately qualified – a degree in a field such as exercise science is ideal.

When joining, haggle for the best price. "Many clubs will make special deals if you ask, although they don't advertise this fact," says Liz Neporent, personal trainer and co-author of *Fitness For Dummies* (Wiley, \$32.95).

They might waive the joining fee for you, or you could get some free personal training, a dietitian consultation, child-minding or even towel usage thrown in.

Finally, read the membership contract carefully – you don't want to get hit with any hidden extras. Still not ready to commit? Ask about a free visit or buy a pass for 10 visits.

So, once you're a member, how do you get the best possible workout?

Cardio machines

There are high-tech cardio machines in every gym, but don't panic – they're not as daunting as they may appear. **TREADMILL** Perfect for beginners, treadmills require little coordination and can be programmed to super slow.

User tip: Swing your arms to boost the amount of kilojoules you burn.

STATIONARY BIKE A low-impact option for those with problem joints. Most gyms have upright and recumbent machines – choose recumbent bikes for back support.

User tip: For the best effect, adjust the seat so your leg is almost straight when the pedal is at its lowest point.

ELLIPTICAL TRAINER A great choice if you enjoy variety. It's simple to use and low impact.

User tip: Pump arms back and forth to increase intensity.

ROWING MACHINES These offer an effective full-body work-out.

User tip: Focus on your legs to drive yourself, and don't hunch.



Gym virgins: Instead of doing 30 minutes on one machine, do 10 minutes on three machines.

Gym bunnies: Interval training burns more kilojoules. Alternate one-minute bursts of high activity, such as treadmill running, with four-minute lots of walking.

Pro tip: Want to avoid crowds? Go on Tuesdays, Thursdays or on weekends, says John Pirlo, manager of Balance Health Club in Newcastle. "These are the quietest days at most gyms," he explains.

Weights

Weight lifting (also known as resistance training) isn't just for bulked-up body builders. It increases muscle mass, boosting metabolism and burning more kilojoules. Plus weight training increases bone density and helps firm wobbly bits.

Weight machines are great for beginners, as they're generally easy to operate. You can work your major muscles in as little as 20 to 30 minutes.

Free weights require you to use more muscles than a machine, though you need balance and coordination.

Gym virgins: Circuit classes can help build confidence.

Gym bunnies: Try free weights. For example, if regular lunges no longer challenge you, try them with a dumbbell in each hand.

Pro tip: Choose a weight so you can do one to three sets of 15 to 25 repetitions. "You have to challenge muscles, otherwise you're wasting your time," says Keli Roberts, celebrity trainer and spokesperson for the Bowflex Home Gym system.



Classes

These are some popular group classes.

SPINNING Burns plenty of kilojoules and firms lower back using stationary bikes. Little coordination is required.

STEP Choreographed routine of stepping up and down. Firms lower body. Moves can be tricky to follow.

BODYPUMP™ Resistance training using free weights. Improves strength, endurance and tone. Suitable for most.

BODY ATTACK™ High-intensity aerobic and toning exercises. Burns kilojoules and increases endurance.

PILATES Concentrated moves on a mat. Works whole body, particularly the mid-section. Suitable for all.

BODYVIVE™ A low-impact Les Mills aerobic, resistance and stretch workout done to retro music. Suitable for all.

Gym virgins: Opt for classes with 'beginner' or 'basic' in the title.

Gym bunnies: Try a new class each month.

Pro tip: Introduce yourself to the teacher. "They can help you if you need it," says Miranda Rooney, a manager at City Gym, East Sydney.

Get up and get counted

For extra motivation, head to the gym with a heart monitor. Funds from every purchase of this Pink Coral Polar F6 monitor go to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, so you can determine heart-rate zones and energy expenditure, and help others. Find it in selected sports stores for \$249 and visit www.pursuit-performance.com.au/polar.

