

GETTING  
STARTED  
ON THE  
ACTIVE WAY  
TO HEALTH



## Going to the Gym?

### What to look for in a gym, fitness or health centre

Getting active is fun. A goal of 30 minutes on most days is easy to achieve. If you have decided to join a gym, or your doctor has prescribed a regular workout, this guide will help you choose the ideal facility. In smaller cities and towns there may not be as much choice, but it is important not to compromise your safety.

Staying motivated over time can be a challenge so it is important to make sure you are happy with your choice before you commit your time and money. Choosing how to start can be a lot easier than you think if you follow a few simple steps and know the questions to ask. Don't be afraid to ask questions - if you are at all unsure about anything, just ask.

#### Things to consider

- **Where is it?**

Choose a gym or fitness centre that is most convenient for when you need to use it. The gym must fit your way of life and routine - if you prefer, for instance, going to the gym before or after work then find one close to your work. If exercising with a friend helps you stay motivated, check out what suits him or her.

- **What are the staff like?**

What is the ratio of staff-to-clients and is there a ceiling on membership? Are the staff tactful, friendly and helpful?

What qualifications do the instructors have? Do they have specific training in exercise suitable for your medical condition if you have one?

- **How do they cater for you?**

Do you feel comfortable with the surroundings of the gym or fitness centre? Does it cater for people like you? Do the posters on the walls inspire you or put you off? If you have been attracted by slick advertising, or been given hard-sell tactics to join, be wary. Is the music to your taste? Ask yourself "Would I feel comfortable exercising here".

- **Payment and contracts**

Most centres offer various payment options including monthly or weekly payments. Often this method is preferable to paying lump sums in advance. There is some protection in weekly payments if the centre goes out of business - you simply stop paying!

If you are paying a weekly or monthly payment make sure you read the contract between you and the centre before signing. Specifically look for the following:

- What is the minimum term?  
(Normally during the minimum term your membership cannot be cancelled - if you are not sure, ask.)
- What happens at the end of the minimum term - do payments automatically continue? Can the amount you pay go up?
- What options do you have if you are unable to use your membership? Are you able to freeze your membership or transfer it to someone else? Are there any charges and/or conditions to do this?

Check that the payment schedule suits you - is it lump sum or pay-as-you-go? Are you able to have a free session before committing? Do they have a 'ten-trip' concession, or discounts for Green Prescription patients or older adults, or for off-peak access?

- **What about the equipment?**

Is there enough equipment to go around, or are there queues? (Visit at the time you intend going.) Is the equipment up to date and well maintained? Is there something to look at when you are on the treadmills or exercycle - television or magazines? Is the equipment labelled (so that you know which to use)?

- **Do they offer classes?**

What classes are offered - low-impact, aerobic, yoga, step or pump? What about relaxation activities such as stretch or tai chi? Is the gym or aerobics room spacious, well lit and with a sufficient airflow? Try to watch a class before joining to see if the music, tempo and impact level are to your liking. Do the times suit?

## • Will it meet your needs?

It is essential that your exercise routine fits your needs and is safe for you, particularly if you are over 40 or have been referred by your doctor.

Staff at the facility should ask you about any medical conditions and your health history. This should include things like high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis or chest pains. You may also be asked what prescription medicines you are taking. Some of these questions can seem intrusive but they are a vital part of ensuring that you exercise safely.

You can also expect to undergo a routine fitness screening - including flexibility tests, a weigh-in and up to 10 minutes on an exercycle. This is so that your basic level of fitness can be assessed and a programme developed to meet your needs.

It is important that you tell the instructor your goals for the programme - whether it be, for example, to increase flexibility, lose weight or just feel better. This will help the instructor to develop a routine just for you. Ask what is realistic for you to achieve within a set period (as discussed with your GP or nurse). Ask how often your results should be reviewed to gauge progress against your goals. Is this part of the membership cost or an extra? (This particular area will vary considerably between centres so be sure to find out.)

## • Personal trainers

Many gyms and fitness centres have personal trainers working in their facility. A personal trainer can help you to stay motivated. If you feel you would benefit from this, ask the staff who they recommend. Ask why they recommend this person, and the cost. A personal trainer's time is usually paid for separately and not part of your membership fee. This will range from \$25-\$80 per hour with an average of about \$45 per hour.

## • What is the overall environment like?

What other facilities do gyms or fitness centres offer - spa, swimming pool, massage, sauna, sunbed, café, creche? How busy are these? Are they part of your membership?

What are hygiene standards like throughout? Are members required to use towels when in a class or on the weights machines? Are the changing rooms and showers clean? Are there hairdryers and storage spaces for your clothing?

Does the facility offer other health education material such as nutritional information, stretching advice, tips to keep you motivated or referrals to other health professionals?

## • For more advice?

Regional sports trusts have a database of gyms and fitness centres in your area that meet recommended standards outlined by the Hillary Commission (based on the above information). Phone **0800 ACTIVE** 0800 228483 for more information.



Fitness New Zealand is the association representing health and fitness centres in New Zealand. Its members agree to abide by the Code of Ethics for the industry, so look for the Fitness NZ symbol in the facility as your guarantee of quality. You can check to see if a club is a member of Fitness New Zealand by checking on the web site

[www.fitnessnz.co.nz](http://www.fitnessnz.co.nz)

or phone **0800 66 88 11**

## The Hillary Commission

Push Play is a nationwide Hillary Commission campaign to get more people more active more often. The campaign aims to increase awareness about the benefits of regular, moderate, physical activity — and how easy it is to get active.

Push Play is based on the fact that everyone benefits from even small amounts of activity. The National Health Committee recommends we get just 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week.

### Push Play says

- physical activity is fun
- it is easy to be active
- physical activity is good for everyone
- it's never too late to start being active
- any activity is better than none
- it doesn't have to be hard to be good for you.

The Hillary Commission is the public funding agency that encourages all New Zealanders to enjoy healthy active lifestyles.

For more information about activities in your area phone

**0800 ACTIVE**  
0800 228483



[www.pushplay.org.nz](http://www.pushplay.org.nz)

