

## How to choose a gym

A resourceful young lady restless with her body's fitness collected and clipped together a selection of my weekly email newsletters. She gleaned through the contents and extracted the thoughts and strategies that appealed to her. Furthermore, she applied them—at first in an awkward way—and discovered to her surprise an internal ability to connect the chaos I offered and found a working continuity as she practiced. She hung to the words “determination,” “persistence” and “patience” until they became more than words but her very own budding attributes.

“I’ve changed,” she says, “I’m ready to go to a gym.” Good for her. It takes courage to seek out a gym and walk through the front door expecting a throng of obnoxiously confident and shapely bodies to evaluate your hips and biceps. Your nifty home gym in the garage, basement or bedroom becomes most attractive suddenly, limitations and all. You miss your favorite blue mat and the clunk of your dumbbells. Relax. Let’s pick out a gym for our daring friend and talk about her choices. Let there be light.

Gyms come in all shapes and sizes: squares, rectangles, L-shaped, U-shaped, upper level, two stories. Go to the cities and they’re on penthouse floors; go to the suburbs and they cover acres, with ball courts, pools, restaurants and golf facilities. Each gym has its own personality largely based on its ownership and operating team, the neighborhood in which it resides and, subsequently, the folks it attracts. Like a mate, there’s a gym for everybody.

Here’s a summary of determining factors to consider, and how they might suit your expectations:

- **Price**

A usual first consideration, but how much it costs to get the most of what you want and need should not be at the top of the list. Hopefully you’ll recognize the imperative nature and true value of your training activity and decide that you’d easily pay more for a gym that inspires.

- **Location**

The nearer to home, work or the center of your activities, the

better. The world has become complicated and excuses fly when we’re on the wrong side of town. Time is money. Right? Truth is, there’s no excuse to put your health and well-being in second place to getting home or even going to the bank. Convenience is golden. However, don’t let it dictate joining a gym you find unlikable just because it’s at your offramp.

- **Hours**

Here’s where 24-hour gyms shine. Just knowing you can go anytime you want has a great appeal. Where do you fit in? Try your best to set a time when your minutes in the gym are honored, unrushed and efficaciously applied. Smile. Be happy. Will you really train at 3a.m.?

- **Phone contact**

Let your fingers do the walking for the first curious steps. If you dial a likely gym and the gym employee snaps, “What do you want?,” you might put a little question mark by that name and go on to the next facility on your list. If you ask price and the answer becomes a secret, put a check by that name and move on. Slick talk is not reserved for carnivals and used-car dealerships. We have to be sharp. Listen for honesty as you engage in conversation, whether professionally conveyed or offered through inexperienced youthfulness. Eventually you’ll want your answers made clear in a visit and a week’s worth of complimentary workouts.

- **Member volume**

How crowded does your prospective gym get? This is a major consideration and can be determined only by visiting the facility at those hours when you’ll normally train. Hop on a stationary bike for a 15-minute cruise and assess your surroundings. What if this was your home training ground? A grand gym down the street with all the attractions and equipment is of no use at all if you can’t work out with focus and efficiency because there are too many bodies on the floor. In fact, the anxiety that ensues is a near crisis to the serious trainer. You want to move smoothly from exercise to exercise without mobs, glares or testy attitudes. Hey, is there parking?

- **Amenities**

Don't pay for a lap pool, giant sauna, lounge and aerobics room if you're not going to use them. More is not necessarily better, and it might be necessarily more expensive. Larger gyms tend to be clubby. Is that what you're looking for?

- **Equipment**

The quality and condition of equipment and the choice of the tools of the trade are central to the final decision. Well-maintained, seasoned machinery—not fresh out of the crate—can be more useful and fun than the recent trick gadgetry turned out daily in this big-bucks industry by tacky, techy entrepreneurs. Enough equipment is enough; too much, poorly laid out, can be a setting for a factory and not an appealing, functional gym.

- **Atmosphere**

Are you standing in a muscle-building gym or a scene where boy meets girl and they hang out like it was the mall? Do the babes cheer the big guys as they spear their Olympic bars across the floor and grunt? Do you think this is cool? No? Go to the next merchant of fitness on your list.

- **Management attitude**

Look for respect, politeness, honest and direct answers, and an eagerness to show you around to discuss your needs and the gym's attributes. Do you feel like a number, a dollar sign or a fellow iron-and-steel aficionado? It happens not infrequently that a good gym is the victim of the bad rap that comes from the bottom-line sharks uptown and several minutes of open conversation brings the dross to the surface.

- **Clientele**

Who's to your left, who's to your right and can you stand them? Are they snobs; are they slobs? Do they yell, groan and bang the weights around? I'm bad. Do they tiptoe, wiggle and whimper? You want to feel comfortable, accepted, appreciated and encouraged where ever you are. You want to look forward to your time in the gym when you can focus, learn and grow. A good gym should be a refuge where you can lick your wounds, as well as a haven of energy for hard work and physical expression.

- **Cleanliness**

Cleanliness and neatness are two outstanding qualities that define the ownership and membership. They are marks of order, responsibility and respect. Perfect is not possible where people by the hundreds work and play, but a unified effort to keep the corners clean is admirable, to say nothing of hygienic. Let's put our weights away and pick up after ourselves, encouraged the merry ole muscle maker in a jolly voice.

Happy hunting.