

How to Start Going to The Gym: A Complete Guide

It's no secret that getting started with training is difficult.

It takes time, effort and courage.

Most beginners don't have the slightest idea what to expect, how to train or even what they want to achieve.



The fact is, there are a lot of moving parts and a lot of things you need to learn for a successful start in the gym.

The alternative is to dive head first and hope for the best. But from my personal experience and that of many other people, you'll waste a lot of time and effort until you get it right.

Bottom line?

If you want to learn how to start going to the gym, this is the only guide you'll ever need to read.

In it, you'll learn everything you need to know:

From getting over your fear of stepping inside a gym to the proper way of training and programming.

Let's dive right in.

Chapter 1 How to Pick the Right Gym

Finding the right gym is crucial. It can be the difference between having a great start or wasting months, even years with suboptimal training.

You'll learn:

- The 7 essential pieces of equipment the gym needs to have for effective training.
- The 8 types of equipment your gym should have, but aren't mandatory.

- The 3 pieces of equipment you shouldn't ever use, even if your gym has them.
- What you need to know about personal trainers and coaches.
- How to hire a good coach and 7 warning signs someone is incompetent
- Why gym rules matter.
- The 4 factors you need to take into account when picking a gym.
- How to properly test a potential gym before committing to a membership.

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Finding the right gym is crucial. It can be the difference between having a great start or wasting months, even years with suboptimal training.

Picking the right gym is also important for convenience' sake.

You don't want to be traveling for an hour every time you train, but you also don't want to sign up to the nearest gym.

Also, the price needs to be reasonable. It's true that you get what you pay for, but the most expensive gym is not the best option.

We'll go over everything you need to know to pick a good gym.

The Essential Equipment Every Gym Should Have

Depending on your goals, which for the readers of my blog are muscle mass, strength gain, and fat loss, your ideal gym needs to have certain equipment:

1. Power rack or squat rack



A squat rack is a construction that allows you to place a bar at the height you want. This allows you to load it up with weight and unrack it for squatting and overhead pressing.

You don't need to lift the weight from the floor to get it to shoulder level.

Power racks are one step up and allow for more flexibility. A power rack consists of four upright posts with two adjustable horizontal bars catches on each side.

The power rack has holes about 2 inches apart, allowing for much greater adjustability for the height of the bar and safety catches.

You can customize a power rack a thousand different ways and do squats, rack pulls, overhead press, bench press, and more.

2.Olympic bars



These are the standard barbells most gyms will have. They weigh ~45lb./20kg and are ~2.2 meters long.

You'll be using them for the core exercises: deadlifts, squats, bench press, overhead press, and rows.

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3.Flat bench



There are standard flat benches and adjustable ones. The flat bench is usually the most used equipment in any gym and it's good to have at least 2-3 in yours.

If your gym has a power rack, you can take an adjustable bench there for your pressing.

4.Pull up bar and dip station



Most gyms offer pull up bars with different grip types. Some have only a standard bar, which also works well.

If you don't immediately see a pull-up bar, look for one at the power rack, smith machine, or cable crossover machine.

The dip station is usually part of a power rack, cable crossover machine or a leg raise machine (some of which also have a pull-up bar on them).

The best dip stations have adjustable handles to fit your shoulder width, but most don't.

5. Wide range of dumbbells (up to at least 100 lbs/45 kg.)



There is no gym out there that doesn't have dumbbells, but you never know.

It is ideal for your gym to have a wide range of dumbbells with small jumps in weight.

If your gym's dumbbells increase at a 10 lb pace, it can get difficult to progress on most exercises. For example, a 10 lb. dumbbell might get light for lateral raises, but the 20 lb. one can be heavy for you.

Also, make sure your gym has heavy dumbbells. When you start training, the 30 lb. ones can feel very heavy, but after a while, you will start using 70+ lb.

6. Space where you can deadlift/row/warm-up

One of the biggest deal-breakers for me are small, tightly-packed gyms with no space for deadlifting.

When the gym doesn't have much free room, it's usually a big pain in the ass to train. You always have to wait for different equipment and there's no space to warm-up well.

Equipment That Is Not Mandatory, But Nice to Have

Unlike the mandatory equipment, the items below shouldn't be deal-breakers when picking a gym, but they certainly can be handy.

1. Weight machines



There are thousands of different machines for every muscle group.

Most gyms have a handful of them, usually some for the chest, back, legs, shoulders, and arms.

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Some gyms have more, others have less.

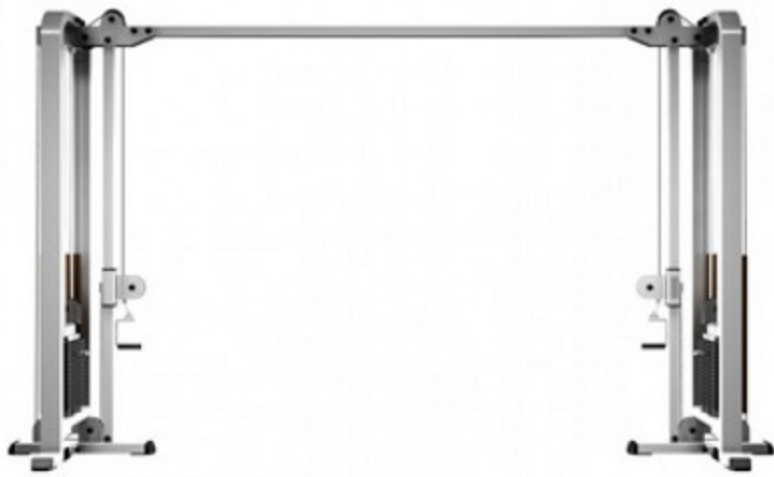
There are two main types of weight machines:

- plate-loaded
- pin-loaded

The plate loaded machines need weight plates for the resistance and are usually more hassle to load up.

Pin loaded machines are more comfortable in this regard. All you need to do is select the weight, put the pin there and go. A cable mechanism moves the weight.

2.Cable crossover machines



These are two independent machines with their separate weight stacks that are connected with a long horizontal pole.

Together, they form the cable crossover machine. The machine is stack loaded and offers many attachments.

The cable crossover is great for bilateral exercises like the cable flys and crucifix curl.

The handles come in two main configurations:

- Adjustable
- Fixed (low and high attachment)

The adjustable ones offer more flexibility and allow you to set the pulley at your preferred height.

The fixed ones are separate and two people can work in together without having to change handles between sets.

3.Bumper weight plates

Bumper plates are like the metal ones, but with one distinct difference:

These are rubbery and have a fixed diameter, regardless of weight. The heavier they are, the wider they get.

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Bumper plates are great for beginners learning the deadlift, but cannot yet pull 135 lb. They allow you to get into the correct starting position and work your way up to using 45 lb./20kg metal plates.

Bumper plates are also great for olympic lifts because you can drop them from an overhead position without damaging the floor.

Some gyms allow only deadlifting with bumper plates to avoid making loud noises or cause damage the floor.

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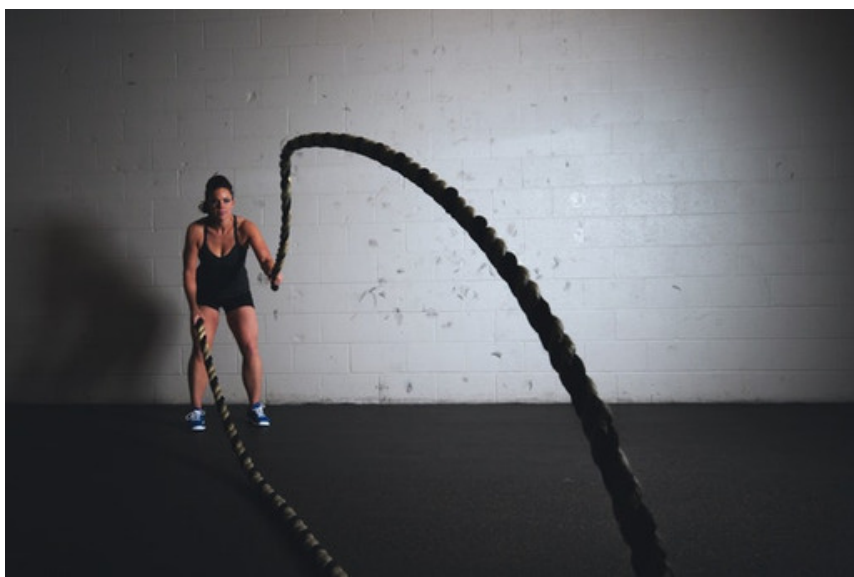
4.Kettlebells



Kettlebells are metal balls with a handle. In most gyms, you won't find a wide range of those. The heaviest ones are around 45 lb.

But, if your gym has a big collection of them, you can use them as a substitute for dumbbells on some exercises.

5.Battle rope station



Conditioning is a crucial element that a lot of people overlook.

A battle rope station allows you to do some pretty intense sessions, build up your endurance and athleticism.

You'll find them anchored to a wall or a sturdy pole. They vary in length and weight and these factors dictate the resistance the ropes offer.

[Beginner Battle Rope Workout \(Video\)](#)

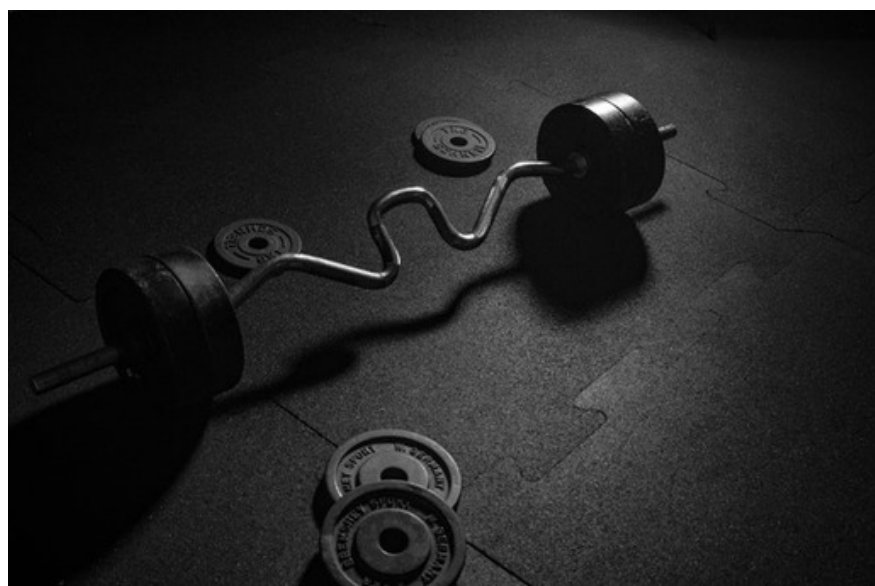
6.Fixed weight bars

These are usually shorter than the olympic bars with the weights already attached.

The rack is usually near the dumbbell area. These bars are convenient for exercises like barbell curls and tricep skullcrushers.

Most big gyms have them. The bars with fixed weight can be straight or w-shaped (EZ bar).

7.EZ-Bars



These bars are also shorter and lighter from your standard olympic bars and bend in a “w”-like shape.

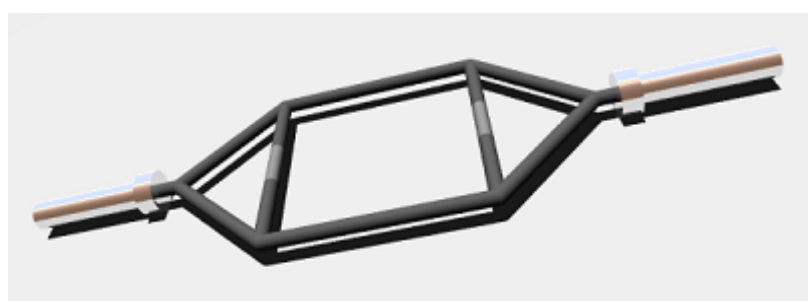
Often used for bicep and tricep exercises because they allow for a different angle of attack.

Also, some people who experience wrist pain with straight bars can find the EZ bar more comfortable.

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8.Trap Bar



This type of bar is also known as a hex bar. When using one, you stand inside and grab the handles by your sides with a neutral grip (palms facing your body).

These bars are a great alternative to straight bars for deadlift.

Equipment That You’ll (Ironically) Find In Most Gyms, But Don’t Really Need

Finally, here’s some equipment that you should simply avoid most of the time, even if your gym has it:

1.Smith machine



The Smith machine is plate loaded and resembles a squat rack, with one distinct difference:

The bar is in a fixed position and can only move up and down.

Some people like to argue that the smith machine is safer to use because it has safety catches every few inches, but you shouldn’t buy into this argument.

Yes, the bar is not going to pin you, because you can rotate and rack it with ease. But the fixed position forces your body to go through an unnatural plane of motion which can lead to injuries.

Aside from that, [research has also shown](#) that the smith machine causes less muscle activation compared to free weights.

2. Barbell pads

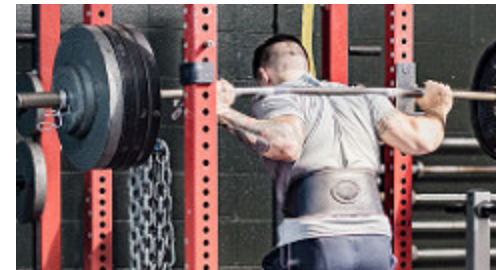


This is a pillow-like accessory item that wraps around the middle of the barbell. Most people use them for squats because they make the barbell feel more comfortable on the traps and back.

But, the bar pad makes it difficult to get the barbell in a stable position, because it compresses under load.

To get the bar in a stable position, you need to remove the bar pad and use your upper traps as a 'shelve'.

To the right is a demonstration of a low-bar back squat. You can never achieve this position and tightness with a bar pad.



You'll feel some discomfort the first time you squat without a bar pad. But that is going to go away within 2-3 squat sessions. Once you get used to it, you can squat hundreds of pounds without any discomfort.

The only good use for the bar pad is on the barbell hip thrust exercise. Placing a heavy barbell on your groin area can be a real pain.

3. Thin 'bodybuilding belts'

Walk into most gyms and I can pretty much guarantee you'll see one thing:

Some guy wearing a thin bodybuilding belt during his entire workout.

Weightlifting belts serve a specific purpose and helping you curl a 55 lb. barbell is not one of them.

Wearing one like that generally won't have any benefit for you.

Everything You Need to Know About Personal Trainers

Some gyms have trainers available to help newcomers with learning the different movements.

Others offer personalized training and nutrition plans.

In most cases, you need to buy a gym membership to get free consultations from the trainers.

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The downside is that you can't be sure how competent the person training you is. Sure, if they have a ton of credibility and loads of testimonials, it can be reassuring.

But when you first meet them, and especially as a newbie in the gym, it's difficult to make the distinction between fact and fiction.

I always recommend taking the time to do your own research and not blindly follow advice and instructions. Knowing more will help you make informed decisions and waste less time.

You'll get a better investment for your time and become independent faster.

Should I hire a coach to help me?

Starting off alone can be difficult. I like to think of myself as a very independent person, but I always welcomed tips and instructions.

But, the trainer at the gym is not going to help you until you get a membership. At least that's how it is in most of the gyms in my city.

If they are kind enough to help you learn the basic movements, that'd be great.

Some gyms offer paid one on one coaching, seminars, and more.

Before you spend money on these, make sure you know what you want.

If your goals are to build muscle and strength while trimming fat, then basic barbell training for at least 6-8 months should be your main goal.

Deadlift.

Bench press.

Barbell squat.

Overhead press.

To these essential movements, I'll recommend some accessory work below.

First, understand that there are a lot of bad trainers out there. People who should be nowhere near barbells not to mention teaching people how to lift them.

There are also some amazing and passionate coaches.

Your coach should have a good chunk of experience in the area you're trying to exceed. If they are a great marathon runner, but you're interested in squatting 300 pounds, they are not the right one for you.

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They should be someone who can explain well and be patient. These are not simple movements and learning them takes time.

Taking the time to learn the four basic barbell movements will yield amazing results for you. These will be the foundation of your training.

I always advocate doing your own research, especially when you're new to training. I've seen all kinds of coaches and some have no idea what they're doing.

From hunch-back deadlifts to bench pressing without leg drive.

But to be able to spot them, you need to have some knowledge.

Read about the basic movements and apply that in your training.

That, in combination with the help of a coach, can give you a great start on your lifting journey.

But, how can you spot a bad coach?

Below, I've written the 7 biggest signs a coach is incompetent. If any or all are present, you'd be better off without them.

1.They're not interested in your training history and/or past injuries. If you have a pre-existing injury, but your trainer doesn't care enough to ask, tell them about it. And if they still don't care and persist with their "one-shoe-fits-all" methods, ditch them.

If you haven't touched a barbell in your life, but your trainer tells you "Okay, first exercise today is the deadlift. Load up a 45 lb. plate on each side. I'll be back in 10 minutes", ditch them.

2.They're not interested in your nutrition. I'm sure you've heard that nutrition plays a very important role in your body's development. Without good nutrition, you'd be wasting your time. And if your coach doesn't care what and how much you eat, they're not fit for the job.

3.They don't practice what they preach. People should practice what they preach. Practice improves your craft and helps you understand things from a different perspective. If your coach doesn't practice what they preach, it's difficult to trust them as an expert. They can't put themselves in your shoes.

4.They're giving you crazy promises, or offering you steroids. I'm all for [motivation](#) and painting a clear picture for the trainee. It helps you stay on the path because you know what you want to achieve. But when your coach starts making crazy promises to sign you up, it's time to go.

Promises like "get a Hollywood physique in 30 days" or "lose 50 pounds of fat in 3 weeks" sound amazing, but are straight up lies.

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And if your coach tries to push drugs to get you instant results with complete disregard to health risks.. Run. Fast.

5.They're not taking note of your progress. A good coach is going to focus on your progress or lack thereof. They are going to ask questions about your nutrition, lifestyle, sleep, medications, and more. If your coach doesn't care how you spend the 23 hours outside the gym and why you're not making progress, they're wasting your time.

6.They're giving you a cookie-cutter program. We are all different and what might work well for me, could be ineffective for you. Because of that, your coach needs to give you a personalized training protocol. One that takes into account what your goals are, what your nutrition is like, and what past injuries you might have had.

7.They're not giving you enough attention. It's fine to give the trainee space to breathe but not receiving enough attention from your coach is disrespectful and even reckless.

Your coach needs to be by your side, in the beginning, ensuring that you're performing each movement correctly before leaving you on your own.

After that, regular check-ups are a good idea to make sure that you're going on the right path.

Showing someone how to deadlift for 5 minutes and then saying "I'll be in the cardio section if you need me" is dumb.

If any or all of these are present, ditch their incompetent ass immediately. You'd be better off doing online research and learning through trial and error.

What Are The Rules Of The Gym and Why It Matters

The rules your gym has are important to note. Some gyms don't allow deadlifting, others don't allow 'loud' noises.

A lot of gyms in my city don't allow the use of chalk, which is a big downside for me. When the weight on the deadlift gets heavy, chalk is an invaluable tool to help your grip.

There are some gyms that don't allow certain types of clothing (for whatever reason).

Even if the gym has everything you need for your training, it could still have some rules that you can't work with and aren't worth putting up with.

Find a gym that fits your needs and don't compromise.

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Distance, Convenience, Price, and Open Hours

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The distance and convenience aspects are very important. You don't want to be traveling for 2 hours to and from your gym, switching between 3 buses and 2 trains.

But you also shouldn't pick the nearest and most convenient gym for the sake of simplicity. There needs to be a balance between what the gym can offer and its location.

On to price. Depending on the location of the gym and what it can offer, the price for a membership can vary a lot. Like with most other things, you get what you pay for, but that doesn't mean you should go to the most expensive gym.

A membership in most gyms will cost you \$30-60/month and will have everything you need.

Finally, open hours. Most gyms in my city have a standard 7 am to 11 pm open hours and that works for me. I like to hit the gym after work.

If you live in the states, there should be some 24h gyms near you. They can be pretty convenient if you work odd hours or like late night training.

If you'd prefer to hit the gym [early morning](#) before work, make sure your gym is open. Likewise with late-night training. If you can't make it to the gym before 9-10 pm, make sure it's open.

Also, take your willpower in consideration. If you find yourself skipping workouts after work, try going before.

If you don't feel good training in the morning, try going in the evening.

Lifting should enhance your life in so many ways, instead of being a burden.

Once You Have Your Target Gym, Test It Out

Alright, you're halfway there. You've found a potential gym, the location is right, it has everything you need, and the price is good.

Before paying for a full membership, you need to test it out for a few workouts. In my country, you can pay for a single workout without having to commit. In some gyms, there are free passes for newcomers and in others, you can pay for a weekly pass.

In any case, make sure to test before you commit.

There's nothing worse than getting a membership and then finding out that the gym isn't what it seems. Maybe it's always swamped with people, the equipment is poorly maintained, there's only one squat rack, or something else.

During your few visits to the new gym, there are some things you need to look out for.

First, make sure to go during the time you will train. The mornings can be peaceful and you may have all the equipment to yourself, but what if you train after work? Trust me, you don't want to be working in with 5 other people on the bench press.

Next, what is the condition of the equipment? Is it well maintained, or are the machines squeaky and the cables on the verge of breaking?

What is the general vibe of the gym? Is it full of serious lifters hungry for progress or filled with gym bros?

The environment you train in can have a huge impact on your progress. What you see every time you train is what the normal will be for you.

If the strongest dude in your gym can only bench 255 lb., you're in the wrong gym.

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Chapter 2

How to Get Over Your Fear of Getting Started

Getting started is often the most difficult step for beginners and many quit before they begin.

A lot of guys and girls are afraid to start going to the gym because they look a certain way.

Some guys think they're too skinny and need to "bulk up" before they start going to the gym. Others think they're too fat and think that they need to get in "good enough shape" to start hitting the gym.

No matter what you look like, these concerns are in your head.

This chapter will teach you how to overcome your fears and take the first step.

You'll learn:

- The 4 reasons why your concerns are all in your head.
- A personal story: my first day in the gym and what I learned.
- How to approach the gym if you feel anxious, step-by-step.

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I've dedicated an entire chapter to help you get over your fears of the gym. Getting started is often the most difficult step for beginners and many quit before they begin.



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No matter what you look like, these concerns are in your head.

I see skinny people at the gym, and I see overweight ones. Some can only bench the bar for a few repetitions, and others are strong for beginners and can jump immediately to 135 lb.

Whatever your case may be, I'm here to help.

1. People are focusing on themselves and their workout, not on you.

Some of the people will take their training very seriously and won't do much looking around. These are usually the people who keep their headphones plugged in and don't talk with anyone.

2. Most people will applaud you for your effort.

Everyone remembers their early days in the gym and how much courage it takes to start. I respect newbies because I still remember that dreadful feeling I had when I first stepped inside a gym.

3. People are as self-conscious as you are.

Shocker, I know.

That big dude loading up 45 lb. plates on the bench? He feels self-conscious sometimes.

How about that girl on the treadmill? Same deal.

We're human. It's in our biology to seek approval and to fit in. Everyone feels inadequate sometimes. Whether that person stepped inside a gym for the first time or has been going for years.

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4. You have to start somewhere.

You don't have to look incredible or lift a ton of weight to start going to the gym. This is not a competition. Start going, build momentum and confidence, and before you know it, you'll be well on your way to looking great.

In any case, when I see these guys and girls, I don't think less of them. In fact, I'm happy for them.

Signing up for a gym was the best decision of my life and I hope it can be so for more and more people.

My First Day At The Gym: A Personal Story

I was 17, and quite overweight. The previous 5-6 years, I had spent eating junk, gaming for 6-12 hours a day, and not exercising.

Not a great start, I'll admit.

But you know what?

I made a choice that day. Enough was enough.

I was tired of feeling self-conscious about my body.

I was tired of feeling winded after a flight of stairs.

I was tired of skipping the beach because I felt ashamed of my body.

I was tired of it all.

I went to the gym, and I made a promise to myself. A promise to finally get fit and start feeling good about myself. After all, I was 17!

The first time I entered the gym, I was downright terrified. It was a small gym near my home that didn't even have a squat rack or a bench, and the dumbbells went up to 75 lbs.

I spoke with the guy there, paid my day's pass and went about warming up. I had no idea what I was doing, but I moved around, and at the time, that was progress.

When the guy who worked there saw that I was a complete newbie, he was kind enough to help me out.



He told me how to warm up and he showed me how to do a lot of exercises.

At first, the 10 lb. dumbbells felt heavy, the movements felt awkward, and I kept thinking to myself “What the hell am I doing?”.

I trained my entire body that day and left the gym with such immense satisfaction. I finally pushed myself outside my comfort zone!

Did I lift a ton of weight? Hell no.

Did I look fit? Hell to the no.

Did I correctly execute each exercise with flawless form? Err.. no.

But I took the first step.

Workout after workout, I improved my technique and got stronger. And with the help of cardio and improved nutrition, I started losing weight.

I started gaining confidence and started learning more about proper training and nutrition.

Not too long after, I started counting calories and tracking protein.

And everything that followed to this day is thanks to that one decision I decided to make years ago:

To take that first step.

Yeah, it was difficult and embarrassing. But I did it and I am so happy. My life is better because of it.

And all it takes is to get over your fear and take the first step. Once you gain momentum and some confidence, nothing can stop you.

Do This If You Feel Anxious

Of course, I understand that anxiety is a big deal. It can make us say and do stupid stuff and feel weak in the knees.

If you find yourself having too difficult a time to get to the weight room, start small.

Get on a cardio machine for 10 minutes. Low-intensity cardio is a great way to warm-up your body. It also gives you some time to acclimate to the environment of the gym.

Get out of your head. Set a pace on the treadmill that allows you to walk for 10-15 minutes.

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Once you warm up a bit, you should feel much calmer to continue with your workout.

Once you get to the weights area, start off with some simple movements.

Do a few pull ups(if you can).

Do some push ups.

Do a set of bodyweight squats.

Follow that with some mobility movements..

..and shoulder dislocations.

Front, side and rear delt raise with light dumbbells.

Band pull-aparts (if you have a band).

Bicep curls, tricep extensions, rows, and squats. Simple exercises you do but with very light resistance for high reps.

Having a friend there with you can be of huge help. Bonus points if he's an experienced lifter.

Once you finish warming up, you should feel much better. Do your workout and leave. That's it.

We'll go much more in-depth on the training aspect in the next two chapters.

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Chapter 3

How to Train for Best Results

Training is a term that could mean a lot of things. For this guide, we'll talk exclusively about lifting weights, building muscle, and getting strong.

In this chapter, we'll go over everything you need to know about proper training for a beginner.

You'll learn:

- All about compound exercises and a list of the most important ones.
- What isolation exercises are, what they are used for and a list of the most common ones.
- The 6 essential movements you need to put 100% of your focus on as a beginner.

- What cardio is, what it does and why you shouldn't overlook it.
- How to warm up properly, prime your body and avoid the risk for injury.
- Progressive overload and ego lifting: what they are and what is their relationship.
- Proper programming and training frequency for beginners.
- How long you should rest between sets.
- What training to failure is and when should it be used.
- Deload and recovery weeks: everything you need to know.
- Your 3 main goals for each workout.

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The Two Main Types of Exercises

There are two main types of exercises you can do:

- Isolation exercises.
- Compound exercises.

There is a debate between people, arguing whether one type of exercise is better, or "superior" to the other. One camp believes that compound exercises are the only thing a good program needs. The other camp swears by isolation movements and bodybuilding-style training.

Unfortunately for both groups, one type of exercises is not better than the other. Both have their uses and an effective program is going to use isolation and compound exercises alike.

What Are Compound Exercises?

Compound movements are those that need more than one muscle group to work. In most cases, the compound move has one major muscle group that does the work and many others that assist.

Here's a list of the most popular compound exercises and the muscles they involve:

Sumo and Conventional Deadlift

Primary muscles worked: Posterior chain (upper and lower back, glutes, hamstrings, etc.)

Secondary muscles worked: Quads, abs, traps, arms, grip strength

Note: One of the best exercises for newbies to start using to build overall strength.

Stiff-Legged and Romanian Deadlift

Primary muscles worked: Posterior chain (upper and lower back, glutes, hamstrings, etc.)

Secondary muscles worked: Quads (much less emphasis), abs, traps, grip strength

Note: This movement puts more emphasis on the posterior chain and almost completely eliminates quad activation.

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Trap Bar Deadlift

Primary muscles worked: Posterior chain (upper and lower back, glutes, hamstrings, etc.)

Secondary muscles worked: Quads (more emphasis), abs, traps, grip strength

Note: Similar to the barbell deadlift, but with slightly better quad activation. Most people can deadlift a bit more with a trap bar compared to a barbell.

Deficit Deadlift

Primary muscles worked: Posterior chain (upper and lower back, glutes, hamstrings, etc.)

Secondary muscles worked: Quads, abs, traps, grip strength

Note: A deadlift variation that more advanced lifters use to improve their strength off the bottom of the lift.

Rack Pull Deadlift

Primary muscles worked: Upper and lower back, grip strength

Secondary muscles worked: Abs, traps, arms

Note: A deadlift variation with a partial range of motion (the upper part) that allows for greater loading. Used by people to strengthen their back, grip and lockout strength.

Rows with Dumbbells, Barbells, and Machines

Primary muscles worked: Upper and lower back

Secondary muscles worked: Abs, forearms, grip strength

Pull Ups, Chin Ups, Lat Pulldowns (All Types of Grips)

Primary muscles worked: Upper and lower back

Secondary muscles worked: Abs, forearms, grip strength

Incline and Flat Barbell Bench Press

Primary muscles worked: Chest

Secondary muscles worked: Front deltoids (shoulders), triceps

Note: Depending on the angle of the pressing, different portions of the chest work more. For example, incline pressing targets the upper chest better, where flat bench pressing works more on the middle and lower chest.

Dips (with forward lean)

Primary muscles worked: Chest

Secondary muscles worked: Front deltoids (shoulders), triceps

Note: Leaning forward helps work your chest better.

Dips (without forward lean)

Primary muscles worked: Triceps

Secondary muscles worked: Front deltoids (shoulders), chest

Note: Staying upright when doing dips helps emphasize your triceps better, and your chest less.

Overhead Shoulder Press

Primary muscles worked: Shoulders (all three heads)

Secondary muscles worked: Triceps, upper chest

Barbell High-Bar Back Squat

Primary muscles worked: Quads, hamstrings, glutes, low back, adductors

Secondary muscles worked: Calves, abdominals, arms

Barbell Low-Bar Back Squat

Primary muscles worked: Quads, hamstrings, glutes, low back, adductors

Secondary muscles worked: Calves, abdominals, arms

Brief note on back squats:

The main difference between high and low bar squats is the position of the bar and the small change in torso angle.

For the low bar squat, the bar is about 2-3 inches lower on your back. Because of that, you need to lean forward a bit to maintain the barbell over mid-foot.

Most people can also squat 10-15% more low bar compared to high bar.

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Barbell Front Squat

Primary muscles worked: Quads, hamstrings, glutes, low and upper back, adductors

Secondary muscles worked: Calves, abdominals, arms

Note: Because the bar sits on your front delts, the demand on your back and core muscles to keep your torso upright is high. Also, the front squat emphasizes the quads more compared to a back squat.

There are more compound exercises out there but we won't be covering all. And we are not even touching on the olympic lifts.

Any exercise that requires two or more muscle groups to work together is a compound lift.

What Are Isolation Exercises?

There are thousands of isolation exercises you can do for all muscles in your body, but we won't be getting into each one. The below ones are the most popular and often used.

Each of these movements targets a specific muscle group. Because of that, you can use much less weight on isolation exercises compared to compound lifts.

And because you're using much less weight, to begin with, progression is more difficult and harder to spot. It's much easier to add 10 lbs. to your bench press compared to your side lateral dumbbell raises.

But isolation exercises serve a specific purpose and that is to help you put all your attention to one single muscle at a time. If you want big arms, deadlifting 500 pounds won't hurt, but tricep extensions and bicep curls are going to speed up the growth process a lot.

Isolation exercises are also crucial to help bring up "lagging" body parts, but we won't get into this now. As a newbie, you don't need to concern yourself with this.

Bicep Curls (With dumbbells, barbells, cables, machines etc.)

Muscles worked: Biceps

Tricep Extensions (With dumbbells, cables, barbells, machines etc.)

Muscles worked: Triceps

Front, Side, Rear Shoulder Raises

Muscles worked: Front, middle, and rear delt respectively

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Incline and Flat Chest Flyes

Muscles worked: Chest

Leg Extensions (On a pin or plate loaded machine)

Muscles worked: Quads

Leg Curls (On a pin or plate loaded machine)

Muscles worked: Hamstrings

Standing and Seated Calf Raises (On a pin or plate loaded machine)

Muscles worked: Calves, soleus

Wrist Curls (Pronated and supinated grip)

Muscles worked: Forearms

Decline Ab Crunches

Muscles worked: Abdominals

The 6 Essential Movements You Need to Learn

As a beginner, your focus should be on the compound movements. Worry about specificity after you build a solid base.

As a gym newbie looking to build big arms, you don't need tons of curls and extensions. You need rows, overhead presses, bench presses, and chin ups/pull ups.

These movements are going to give you the best bang for your buck. Also, thanks to "newbie gains" (which I've dedicated an entire point for in chapter 4), you'll grow like a weed from week to week.

Beginnings are often hard and if you try to learn dozens of exercises, you can get overwhelmed.

Here are the 6 movements you need to master before even thinking about accessory work:

1. Deadlift

The deadlift is a movement where you to lift a barbell from a dead stop to lockout position, hence the "dead" in the lift.

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There are two primary stances:

- the conventional with your feet closer than shoulder-width apart;
- the sumo with your feet spread outside shoulder-width apart.

Both variations are identical and work your entire body. Whichever you decide to do is up to you, your anatomy and personal preference. A good coach can help you figure out which style is going to suit you better.

Here's one tip for mastering the deadlift:

Because this movement heavily emphasizes the posterior chain, I recommend taking the time to learn how to properly load your hamstrings.

Learning that movement pattern will make the deadlift much easier and more natural.

Video: [STOP deadlifting until you learn how to do THIS/How To:Romanian DL](#)

Video: [How to Conventional Deadlift](#)

Video: [How to Sumo Deadlift](#)

2.Squat

The squat is another full-body movement that primarily works the legs. A lot of people like to skip training their legs and that is a huge mistake. Not only are weak and skinny legs unattractive, but having a built upper body makes you look asymmetrical.

Squats are going to be the base of your leg training and your sole focus for the first few months.

Most beginners are better off learning how to high-bar squat first, as it feels more natural. Once you gain some experience, you can always try the low bar squat or switch to it completely.

Video: [How to Barbell Back Squat](#)

3.Bench Press

The most "bro" exercise out there. Usually, when someone new enters the gym, the first place they go to is the bench press. And for a good reason: the bench is an excellent exercise that develops the chest, shoulders, and triceps.

I'm sure you don't need much more convincing to start benching.

Still, when you begin doing this exercise, make sure you nail down the form before adding heavy weights.

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Video: [The Official Bench Press Check List](#)

4.Overhead Press

A great exercise to improve pressing strength and grow your shoulders. But, I see a common trend where beginners skip this fundamental movement for shoulder development. Instead, they only do a bunch of isolating exercises.

Not a surprise when you hear most people whining about their “lagging” shoulders.

Video: [How to Perform Overhead Press - Proper Technique & Form](#)

5.Pull-up/Chin-up

Next to the deadlift, the pull up and chin up are two of the best back strengthening exercises. They help develop both the thickness and the width of the back, thanks to the direct emphasis on the lats.

These two movements also involve the bicep and make it grow.

Video: [Beginner - Chin-up](#)

Video: [How to do a Perfect Pull-up](#)

6.Barbell Rows

The final movement you need to put your attention to is the barbell row. Whether you do the pendlay row or the more traditional bent-over row, there is no big difference. Make sure to always use a weight that allows proper form and a full range of motion.

Video: [How To Bent Over Barbell Row](#)

Video: ["How To" Barbell Row \(pendlay version\)](#)

These are the 6 exercises you should put 100% of your focus on for at least 6-8 months. They are going to help you build the strength and muscle base and it's much easier to make progress on them.

After that, you can start adding accessory movements into your training. Still, that is well into the future and not your concern right now.

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What Is Cardio and Why You Shouldn't Overlook It

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Cardio is short for cardiovascular work. Any type of activity that raises your heart rate and keeps it there for a prolonged period is a form of cardio.



Jogging, sprinting, riding a bike, swimming and walking are all cardio activities. There are many other types of cardio, most of which need at least some equipment to do. Rope jumping and sled pushing come to mind.



There are two main types of cardio:

- Low-intensity steady state (such as jogging);
- High-intensity interval training (such as sprinting).

Both types of cardio have their benefits and I won't go much into them, but I will give you some recommendations.

But first, let's talk about why cardio is important.

Cardio improves your aerobic capacity (the ability of your body to use oxygen for energy production).

This has a direct carryover to things such as:

- Improved recovery time between sets;
- Improved performance on each set, more reps with the same weight;
- Improved recovery time between workouts;
- Feeling less fatigued or winded after a tough set;

All these factors increase the quality of your training program and lead to better results over time.

As a beginner who's starting off with lifting, I recommend one to two low-intensity sessions per week. Each for 20-30 minutes at 60-70% of your maximum heart rate (usually around 130).

A stationary bike is your best option because it won't interfere much with your training. Treadmill walking is also a good alternative.

And if you're overweight, to begin with, I don't recommend running or sprinting. They are high-impact cardio types and it can be stressful on your joints if you have more pounds to carry.

Why Warming Up is Very Important and How to do It Properly

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Warming up is one of the most often overlooked aspects of training. Most guys enter the gym, do a few arm swings and lay down on the bench.



Big mistake.



You see, warming up is critical because:

- It improves your mobility and flexibility, leading to the better execution of each exercise.
- It increases your core body temperature, warms up your muscles and synovial fluid for less joint wear and more stability.
- It decreases your risk of injury when training with heavy weights.
- It primes your mind and body for the work you're about to do.

A good warm-up will lift your mood, increase your energy and performance.

A bad warm-up will leave you lethargic, unmotivated, stiff and prone to injury.

I've been in both camps and I can say with absolute confidence:

Warming up well for 10-15 minutes is the best investment of your time. Even if the following workout isn't your best, a good warm-up is a must.

Since warming up is such an important aspect of lifting, there have been many suggestions made on what a good warm up actually is. The truth is, there is no one perfect way to warm up. As long as your warm-up achieves the 4 things I listed above, you're doing well.

But, I will give you some pointers about what a proper warm-up looks like and how to design one for yourself.

A good warm-up consists of two parts: general and specific.

General warm-up

- Low-intensity cardio for 5-10 minutes (treadmill, jump rope, elliptical trainer, etc.).
-
- Your goal here is to raise your body temperature, get your heart rate up and warm up your joint's synovial fluid (as mentioned above). Whole body dynamic drills are also great to do at this point.

Video: [Full Body Dynamic Warm Up](#)

Specific warm-up

Once you've raised your body temperature, it's time to take a step further and give extra attention to the joints you're about to work.

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[Here is a video by Scott Herman](#) demonstrating a great warm-up routine for the shoulders (that takes less than 5 minutes).



Also, it's important to work your way up to the heavy sets. Don't immediately load up your working set weight.

For example:

If you bench 135 lbs for 5 reps, working your way up would look like this:

(Keep in mind that you should never take a warm-up set to failure. Only do as many reps as you feel comfortable with.)

Set 1 (warm-up): 45 lbs (bar only) for 15-25 reps

Set 2 (warm-up): 95 lbs for 4-6 reps

Set 3 (first working set): 135 lbs for 5 reps

You can do more than one warm-up sets with the bar alone if you'd like.

The goal of the specific warm-up is to activate your muscles, stabilize your joints, and prime your nervous system.

And if you can't bench press much more than the bar alone, do a few sets with 45 pounds to warm up well. After that, add the weight you can work with and go from there.

Progressive Overload and Ego Lifting

As a beginner, there is one training principle you need to learn:

Progressive overload.

"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

– Albert Einstein

This is an excellent quote that is quite fitting in the context of training. You see, a lot of guys start training with excitement and motivation, but, after a few weeks or months, they fall into what I like to call the 'comfort zone of training.'

They start training half-heartedly, doing just enough work to get by and call it a workout, but not enough to force further progress.

And you can find people all over the internet, asking a question that more or less looks like this:

“Why can’t I get any stronger or build more muscle?”

And it’s frustrating because these same guys are putting in work, but not making any progress. They are more or less wasting their time.

And this is where an often overlooked (but essential) principle of training comes to play: progressive overload.

Put in simple terms, progressive overload refers to the act of forcing your body to adapt to a tension (or stress) that is greater than what it has experienced before.

Now, why is progressive overload important?

You see, your body’s main objective is to keep you alive. It doesn’t care about your ambitions to get jacked or lean, and it certainly can’t be bothered by the fact that you want to bench press 315 pounds one day.

All it cares for is survival.

However, by progressively forcing it to respond to greater and greater stressors, it has to create positive adaptations so it can then handle these same stressors with less effort (and by extent, these same stressors would create smaller and smaller homeostatic disruptions with each passing workout).

But since the process is ongoing, you never allow it to get ‘comfortable’ and thus you force it to grow bigger and stronger on an ongoing basis.

Now, here’s where most guys get it wrong:

By training half-heartedly, they never force the body to adapt to a greater stress. Hell, at one point, you just have to ask yourself, “Is bench pressing 185 pounds for 4 sets of 5 reps for the 1232nd week in a row going to grow my chest further?”

Put in simple terms, if you are not seeing any performance improvements over the weeks and months of training, there’s a good chance that you’re not getting stronger or building muscle. Oh, and you’re slacking off big time.

Now, progressive overload doesn’t just mean “lift more weight.” In fact, there are many ways to gauge your progress in the gym:

- Lifting the same weight, but with a longer range of motion.
- Lifting the same weight, but with smoother form, more control, more speed, and less effort.
- Lifting the same weight for the same number of sets and reps, but with smaller rest intervals. And to that extent, completing the same workout, but in less time.

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- Lifting the same weight, but for more repetitions.
- Lifting the same weight, for the same repetitions, but for more total sets.
- Maintaining all of the above-mentioned adaptations while losing body weight (improving your relative strength).

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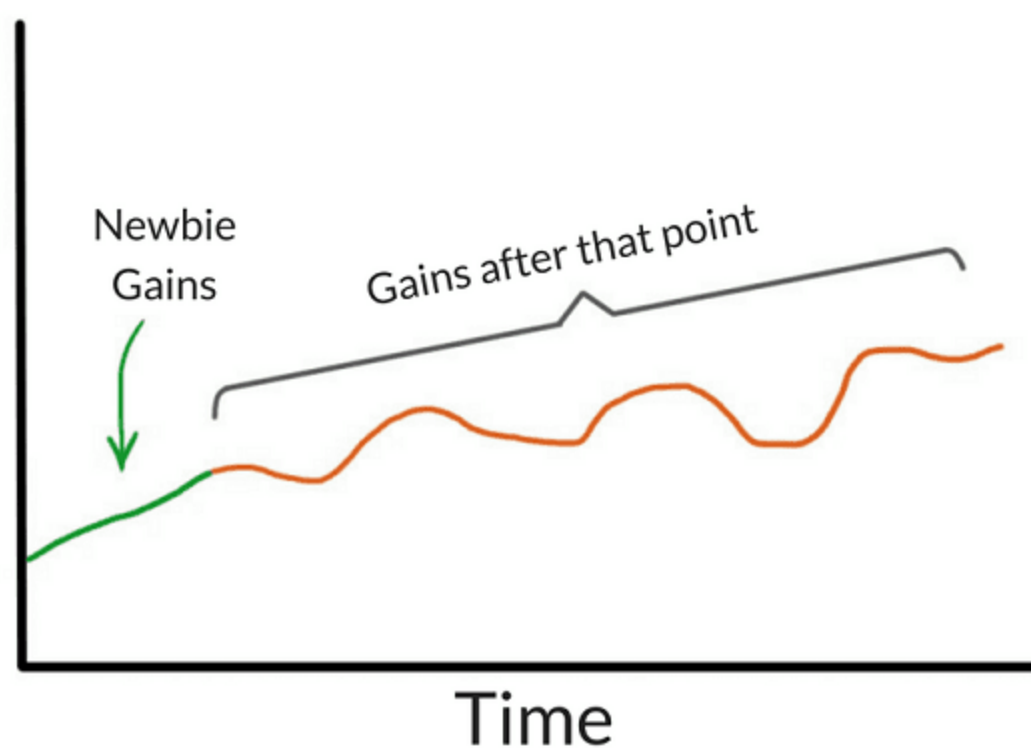
So, the bottom line?

There are many ways to gauge your progress in the gym and loading more weight on the bar is not always the best option. In fact, you should try to add more weight only after you've lifted a slightly lighter weight with great form and a full range of motion.

A 405-pound half-squat is not nearly as impressive as [this chap](#) thinks it is.

This usually happens, because a lot of guys out there carry this false belief that they need to be lifting more weight with each passing week. So they load up more weight, only for their form to go to hell. That's not progressive overload or 'getting stronger', that's just ego lifting.

The only time where you'll likely load up more and more weight on the bar from week to week is while you're still a newbie and training is a very new type of stressor to your body. After that, progress begins to look something like this:



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Welcome to the club, mate.

No positive adaptations (be it getting stronger, faster, more endurant, etc.) is ever going to be linear. These improvements are often unpredictable and depend on a multitude of factors. Sometimes you'll make progress seemingly easily, while other times you'll beg for 5 lbs. on your squat.

Think about it this way:

If you could add 5 pounds to your squat each week, you'd increase it by 260 pounds in a year. Yes, that would be awesome, but it won't happen.

Proper Programming And Training Frequency

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With so many different styles of training and programs out there, most beginners don't know where to start. To help you make a good choice, I'll go over what makes a program effective and what are the things you need to learn as a beginner.

A good training program has the following:

1) Adequate training frequency

Training frequency refers to how often you work out. A high-frequency program would be one where you train often (4-5+ times per week).

A low or moderate frequency program would be one where you train 3 or fewer times per week.

As a beginner, lifting 3 times per week is enough to get you into the habit of consistent training. And also build a base of strength and muscle mass to work off later.

2) Enough training volume

Training volume refers to how much work you do within a given workout or week for each muscle group. You can track volume in many different ways such as counting sets and reps.

But the most common and accurate way: weight lifted x repetitions done x sets done.

For example, doing 20-25 sets with varying repetition ranges for your chest every week is high-volume training.

But, doing 10 or fewer sets per week for your chest is low-volume training.

Now, training intensity influences training volume, so let's take a look at it next:

3) Adequate training intensity

Training intensity refers to 2 things:

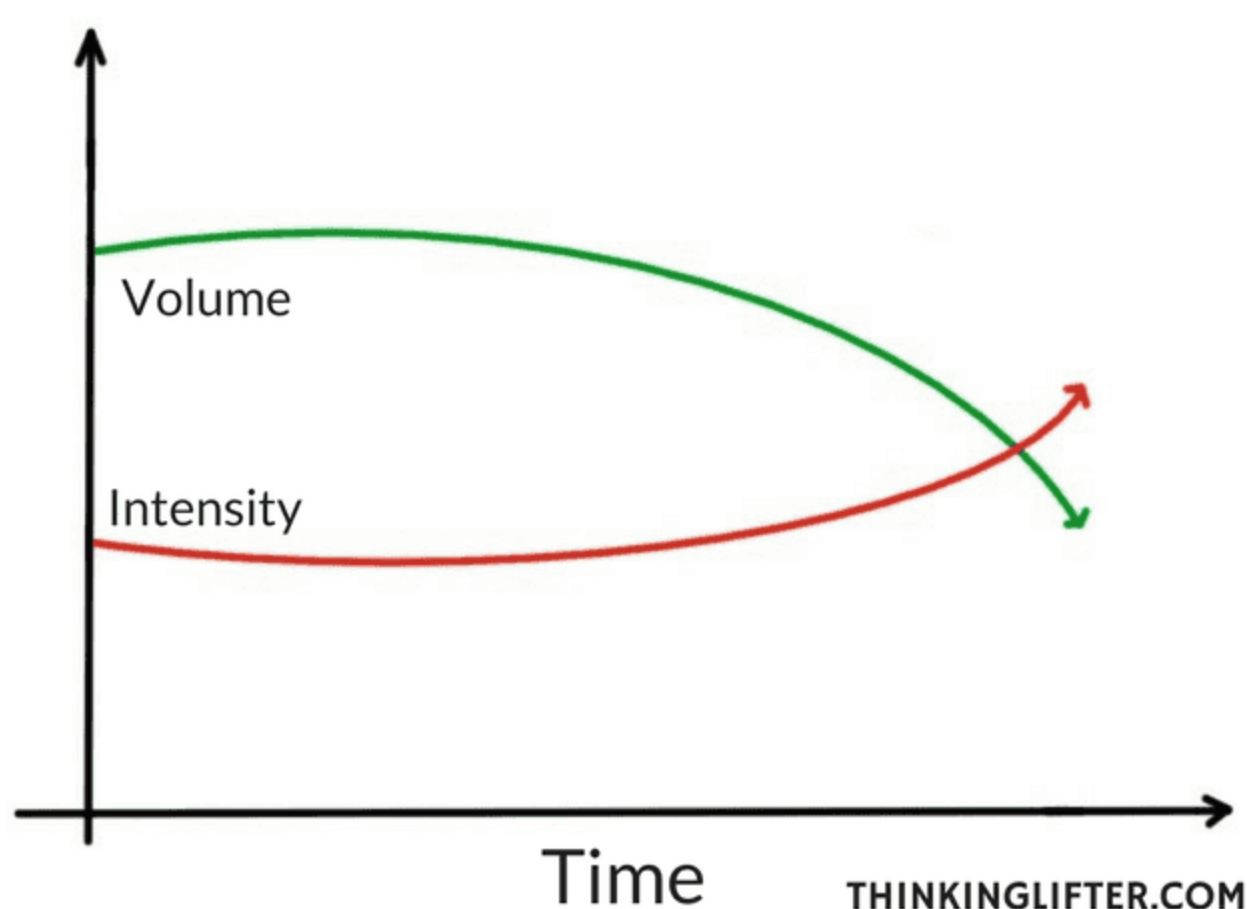
- the perceived effort you put into your workouts;
- the percentage of your one repetition max (1RM).

We won't be looking at RPE (rate of perceived effort) here. As a beginner, you don't have the experience needed to use RPE scales.

So let's take a look at the second meaning of training intensity, the percentage of your 1RM. For example, if you can bench press 135 pounds for a single, that would be your 1RM and 100% training intensity.

Training with weights over 80-85% of 1RM is high intensity. Training with 70% or less is moderate or low intensity of training.

The reason why intensity and volume influence each other is because you cannot have both at the same time. If you train with high intensity, your volume is going to be lower. Likewise, if you train with moderate or low intensity, the volume is going to be high.



Doing 5 sets of 3 reps at 85% of 1RM is lower volume than doing 5 sets of 10 reps at 70% of 1RM.

In order for your training to be effective, you need to have diversity. That is, using different levels of intensity.

Training with 85+% of 1RM all the time is counterproductive. You can't build much training volume, not to mention the beating your joints would be getting all the time.

Likewise, training only with 60-70% of 1RM is also counterproductive. It makes it difficult for you to make strength gains which are crucial for long-term progress.

4) Progression built-in

Any decent program out there is going to use some sort of a progression scheme. There are many types out there with the most popular one for beginners being a linear progression.

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Because beginners can enjoy the blessings of newbie gains, using linear progression will work great.

Linear progression works like this:

Start off your training with a weight that allows you to do 5 repetitions with good form. The last rep should feel difficult but not to absolute failure. That is, you should be able to grind out a 6th repetition if you had to.

Each week, add the following:

- 2.5 kg for upper body lifts(bench press, barbell row, overhead press)
- 2.5 kg to your squats
- 5 kg to your deadlift

Your gym should also have the 0.75kg/1.65lb fractional plates. After a while, adding 2.5 kg to your overhead press and row can get difficult and this is where these bad boys come in handy.

If not, you can also buy them from Amazon.

How would you know what weights to start with?

Simple.

Start with an empty bar and add weight for sets of 5 reps. Once you feel like the bar speed starts slowing down or your form begins to break, remove 2.5 kg. That is your starting point.

I recommend taking an entire week to find your starting weight for each exercise. You'll still get some pretty decent workouts done, so don't worry.

Rest Periods Between Sets

There are general guidelines you should follow for resting between sets.

- For your heavy sets of 4-6 reps, rest 3-5 minutes.
- For your lighter sets of 6-10 reps, 2-3 minutes.
- For exercises like face pulls, where reps are 15-20, rest no longer than 60 seconds.

Think of rest periods as a tool that will help you complete your recommended repetitions.

If you don't rest enough, your performance is going to suffer and your training volume will be less.

If your program calls for 5 sets of 3 reps on the deadlift, make sure to rest long enough so you can complete your 15 total reps without having to decrease the load.

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Training to Failure: Should You Do It?

We often toss around the term "technical failure" and there are a ton of mixed feelings among people. Some deem it the holy grail of muscle growth and strength gain. Others consider it an unnecessary part of training, only good for burning yourself out.

In essence, training to failure is the process of lifting a weight to a point where the muscles at work cannot produce enough force to move it anymore. Now, this does not mean that your muscles are completely exhausted, it only means they are exhausted relative to that load.

A big drawback of training to failure is the breakdown of form. As we perform more and more reps and get more fatigued, our [form can break down](#) and that could lead to an injury. This is especially true for the complex lifts: the squat, the deadlift and the bench press.

A good rule of thumb to follow is this:

The more complex an exercise is, the better it is to train within your limit and not push to failure.

Side lateral dumbbell raises? Sure, take the set to failure.

Deadlifts? You should leave a rep in the tank.

As a beginner who's learning the movements, taking sets to failure can be dangerous.

A seasoned lifter can gauge when their form begins to break down. But as a newbie, you're more likely to hurt yourself.

Your 3 Main Goals For Each Workout



1. Build Momentum



2. Learn the Movements



3. Get Stronger

As a beginner, there are three main things you need to get out of your workouts.

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1. Building momentum

I've never had trouble committing to the gym. I loved it from the start, I was addicted to the progress. Training increased my confidence, energy and drive to live my life.

Yet, some people have trouble getting started and it takes time for them to fall in love with training.

That's alright. It happens.

My advice for you is simple:

Take it one workout at a time. Go in, do your workout, leave. The next time, do it all over again.

Step by step.

Don't think about workouts ahead of time and how you "have to" get to the gym on Friday after work.

Put your focus on the next workout and it alone.

Three times a week is not a lot of time. An entire week consists of 168 hours. Spend 3 of them training, you still have 165 hours left for everything else.

But these 3 hours you devote every week will make a tremendous difference over the span of months.

After a while, you'll realize that you've got the momentum going and you don't have to put any conscious effort to get to the gym.

2. Learning the movements

I know people who have been lifting for over 3 years and don't do a single exercise correctly. Needless to say, their progress reflects that fact.

Learning how to perform each exercise the right way is so important and I keep repeating it, but not everyone realizes it.

From a partial range of motion on bicep curls to swinging the barbell when doing rows. These are all small errors in training that most people overlook. But they add up and can cripple your progress.

Spend your time in the gym perfecting your form and only add weight when you feel comfortable that your form is solid.

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3. Getting stronger

The final and most engaging aspect of training is progressing.

As a newbie, you can expect to make strength gains from week to week. Hell, even from workout to workout.

It's fun, it's inspiring and it motivates you to keep coming back to the gym.

One of your main goals for each workout should be to make progress. Whether it be more weight on the bar, a few extra repetitions with the same weight, or resting less between sets.

These are all aspects of progress that you need to be able to recognize.

I'm not going to lie, after a while, when your newbie gains stop, making progress is going to get more difficult.

But you shouldn't let that discourage you.

Always push for some sort of progress. Over time, that is going to be the difference between building a great physique and "kind of" looking better than you did 3 years ago.

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Chapter 4

Frequently Asked Questions

As a beginner, you probably have a million questions.

In this chapter, we'll take a look at the most common questions beginners ask me and I'll provide you with in-depth answers.

You'll learn:

- What newbie gains are and how to use them to your advantage.
- What "the pump" is and why you shouldn't concern yourself with it.
- What you can expect to gain from lifting and why "When will I be jacked?" is a wrong question to ask.
- What is muscle soreness, what does it indicate and why it shouldn't bother you.
- What is broscience and how to defend yourself against it.
- What type of clothing and shoes you need for lifting.
- What the 2 accessory items you should consider getting for the gym are.
- The 10 unwritten rules you need to follow in any gym.

In this chapter, we'll take an in-depth look at the most common questions beginners ask me.

I've heard about newbie gains. What is that, exactly?

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As we already discussed, the beginning can be difficult and scary. You've got to learn new movements, get used to a new environment, and more.

But there is a silver lining to this period:

You get to make a hell of a lot of progress in a few short months. Any program, or even a classic bro-split, will make you grow and get stronger as long as you're consistent.

This phenomenon is often referred as "newbie gains" and it happens because your body is not used to the stimulus of training.

There are two main mechanisms which drive this growth:

1. Your gain more muscle during that period and that impacts your strength. Most guys can gain around 20-22 pounds of muscle mass in their first year of training. Compare that to the 2-3 pounds you can gain a year after your 4-5th year of training.

Year of Proper Training	Potential Rate of Muscle Gain per Year
1	20-25 pounds (2 pounds per month)
2	10-12 pounds (1 pound per month)
3	5-6 pounds (0.5 pound per month)
4+	2-3 pounds (not worth calculating)

Credits: <http://www.bodyrecomposition.com/muscle-gain/whats-my-genetic-muscular-potential.html/>

2. Your body is not used to the movements. The more complex the exercise is, the greatest progress you'll be able to make on it. This happens because your nervous system needs time to learn how to use the muscle mass and leverages you already have to lift the weight.

The newbie period usually lasts anywhere between 2 and 8 months and your progress slows down after that.

The weekly progress is fun but it doesn't last forever. After the newbie period is over, you'll have to put in more effort to keep progressing and it won't be a linear process. You'll often find yourself weaker before you get stronger.

But if I only do heavy compound lifts, I won't get a pump. What gives?

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Alright, I had this one coming. Fair enough. I'll give you an explanation.

In simple terms, the pump is blood rushing to the muscles at work. Your muscles feel fuller and bigger thanks to that. The feeling is pretty awesome and a good bicep and tricep pump can give your arm an entire inch of girth, albeit for a short time.

How big of a pump you get depends on different factors. Such are:

- How many carbs you've consumed.
- How short your rest periods between sets are.
- What the rep tempo is.
- How many repetitions you do.

The more intense and longer your workout is, the better the pump you'll likely get.

A lot of gym bros consider the pump to be of utmost importance for muscle growth. But, getting a good pump from a workout doesn't necessarily make it effective.

Likewise, not getting a pump from your workout doesn't make it ineffective.

A few heavy sets on the deadlift won't give you a pump but you can bet your ass that they'll stimulate muscle growth and strength improvements.

When will I get jacked?

I've decided to write about this a bit because a lot of people seem to have this misconception about training. Most people get into training not knowing what to expect.

When I encounter people looking to get into training, there are 3 main groups.

Group #1: Overweight people - "How can I turn this fat into muscle?"

This is usually the first question every overweight beginner asks me. My answers is always the same:

You cannot turn fat into muscle. It is not possible. What you can do is start eating in a modest deficit, lift 3 times per week, do some cardio and build muscle and lose fat at the same time.

Because your body isn't used to the stimulus training provides, even small amounts of intense training is going to cause adaptation and growth.



That is why, as a beginner, you can more easily do a [body recomposition](#), drop fat, build muscle, and get stronger.

Group #2: Skinny guys - “No matter how much I eat, I can’t put on weight!”

Every self-proclaimed “hardgainer” says this. I swear, it’s like a broken record.

First of all, you’re not a hardgainer. Yes, you may have a fast metabolism and a lower appetite compared to most people, but that doesn’t mean you can’t gain weight, or muscle, to be more precise.

Every time I ask a “hardgainer” to describe what they roughly eat in a day, I get more and more convinced that “hardgainers” do not exist.

It is usually like this:

Breakfast: ?????

Lunch: A snickers bar, a Coke can, and a packet of gummy bears.

Afternoon: ?????

Dinner: A few slices of pizza and some dessert if they feel ambitious.

Whoa, there. And you’re not gaining weight? I’m baffled!

“But people always ask me how I’m not getting fat while eating all this junk!”

Yeah, they are, because most people have no idea how the human body works and what energy balance is.

They think that a chocolate bar instantly turns into fat once you eat it.

You are eating 2000-2200 calories a day. How do you expect to gain weight?

Furthermore, not only are you not eating as much food as you think you are, but the quality is crap too.

If you are not eating enough protein every day, your body won’t be able to build muscle. It’s that simple.

So stop with the self-limiting beliefs that you’re doomed to walk this earth skin and bone.

Calculate your TDEE, eat 200-400 calories above that, start replacing junk foods with higher quality ones, lift 3 times a week and come back to me in 6 months.

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To get to your TDEE, you first need to calculate your Basal Metabolic Rate. Use the below formula:

English BMR Formula
Women: $BMR = 655 + (4.35 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (4.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (4.7 \times \text{age in years})$
Men: $BMR = 66 + (6.23 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (12.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (6.8 \times \text{age in year})$

Metric BMR Formula
Women: $BMR = 655 + (9.6 \times \text{weight in kilos}) + (1.8 \times \text{height in cm}) - (4.7 \times \text{age in years})$
Men: $BMR = 66 + (13.7 \times \text{weight in kilos}) + (5 \times \text{height in cm}) - (6.8 \times \text{age in years})$

Credits to: <http://www.bmi-calculator.net/bmr-calculator/bmr-formula.php>

Now, based on your activity level (be honest), calculate your TDEE:

Harris Benedict Formula
To determine your total daily calorie needs, multiply your **BMR** by the appropriate activity factor, as follows:

- If you are sedentary (little or no exercise) : $\text{Calorie-Calculation} = BMR \times 1.2$
- If you are lightly active (light exercise/sports 1-3 days/week) : $\text{Calorie-Calculation} = BMR \times 1.375$
- If you are moderatetely active (moderate exercise/sports 3-5 days/week) : $\text{Calorie-Calculation} = BMR \times 1.55$
- If you are very active (hard exercise/sports 6-7 days a week) : $\text{Calorie-Calculation} = BMR \times 1.725$
- If you are extra active (very hard exercise/sports & physical job or 2x training) : $\text{Calorie-Calculation} = BMR \times 1.9$

Credits: <http://www.bmi-calculator.net/bmr-calculator/bmr-formula.php>

Group #3: Skinny-fat guys - “I just want to lose my love handles.”

Skinny-fat guys are usually older, but they can be in any age group.

Like the overweight guys, these people also want to trim fat and build muscle, or “turn the fat into muscle.”

As a newbie to lifting, the same rules apply to you, whether you’re skinny fat or overweight.

You can do a recomposition protocol where you eat in a modest caloric deficit, lift 3 times a week and do some cardio. This is going to help you burn fat, gain muscle and strength, and improve the way your body looks.

I’ve written an entire guide on [getting rid of the skinny fat look](#) that goes much more in-depth.

Alright, so these are the 3 main stereotypes. Not everyone fits them, but the majority do.

If you find yourself to fit one of these categories, don’t worry. Frankly, I’d be surprised if you didn’t.

The fitness industry is so full of misinformation that it can be frustrating for a beginner to head in the right direction.

Most “gurus” out there are looking for a quick buck, pushing their crappy products and claiming that theirs is the solution you need.

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And when beginners buy into these lies, they waste time and money and don't get any good results out of it.

I've created this guide to push you in the right direction and give you all the information you need. That way, you can get the momentum and free yourself from all the crap floating around.

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Muscle soreness, what does it mean?

You know that nasty feeling you get in your muscles a day or two after doing some physical activity?

Maybe you hit the gym once, and now you're sore all over. Or you went running the other day, and now your calves are on fire.

Whatever your case may be, this is muscle soreness. And it feels crappy. It impairs your movement and you feel achy.

The good news?

Muscle soreness becomes much less dramatic once you start lifting on a regular basis. And even if you do get sore, the feeling will likely be much less noticeable and you may even grow to like the feeling.

Or is it just me?

But now to the important stuff:

Does muscle soreness mean that you've had a productive workout?

In short, no. (Even though I felt sore for over a week after my first ever leg day. Smh.)

A ton of different activities can cause muscle soreness, a lot of which have been shown to cause minimal (if any) muscle gain. Running comes to mind.

Muscle soreness is primarily caused by some degree of muscle fiber damage. There's also the idea that metabolic stress thanks to training also plays a role in muscle soreness.

Metabolic stress from training can cause structural changes at the cell membrane. This would allow for fluids and other stuff to enter and promote inflammation.

This idea explains why doing direct bicep work for higher repetitions can cause huge muscle soreness in the following days. But at the same time, doing a few heavy sets of deadlifting doesn't cause soreness in your biceps, even though they contribute isometrically.

A common myth is that lactic acid build-up is what causes soreness after physical activity. This idea is old and has been disproven.

And then there's the fact that newbies often have the most severe muscle soreness after training, and they usually grow the fastest. So you can see where this wrong correlation arises.

Furthermore, muscle soreness, if very severe, can [cause reduced performance in later workouts](#). One, because it impairs range of motion on different exercises. And two, because it reduces force production.

This could lead to less effective workouts and smaller adaptations over time.

And as a beginner, this may sound kind of scary for you, but don't worry.

As I said already, muscle soreness becomes less and less pronounced as you establish a lifting routine. You'll likely feel very sore once or twice.

Also, [there are some ways](#) to help mitigate muscle soreness, if you're interested.

What is broscience?

Oh, boy. I don't like to talk about broscience and I usually pretend it doesn't exist, but it keeps on creeping up on me.

The good news?

Brosience is slowly dying as more and more people are getting educated on proper training and nutrition. But, it's still strong in most gyms.

As a beginner, you'll be a prime target for it and you need to know how to protect yourself.

First thing's first:

The biggest, loudest and strongest dude in the gym is not always the best option for free advice.

Shocking, but hear me out:

You can't know how that big dude got to that point. For all you know, he could be on all sorts of drugs.

Steroids can make up for a lot of bad training and nutrition mistakes. Consistency also helps people make progress even if their program isn't optimal.

There are a lot of dogmatic ideas about training and nutrition that have been around for decades. Brosience is comprised of these ideas, arguments, and myths.

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And when the big dude who doesn't know better spreads these ideas around the gym, the newbies with no real knowledge are the first to go down the rabbit hole.

Can some of these ideas be true and actually solid advice? Absolutely!

But are they, really? In most cases, no.

Listening to such advice often leads to ineffective and unneeded complications to the whole process of eating and training.

No, you don't need to be taking 2.5 grams of creatine before and after your workout.

Creatine makes a difference when your body becomes saturated with it. Taking 5 grams/day for a month is enough to see it work.

No, you don't need to avoid deadlifting because "it is bad for your back".

You need to learn how to do it properly, set your ego aside and progressively get stronger.

(Of course, having a pre-existing low back injury changes things.)

There are much more "facts" you'll hear at the gym and I can't possibly go over all here.

But I can give you this one piece of advice:

Double-check everything. Some of the ideas you'll hear are so old and outdated that educated people have known better back in the 90s. Other ideas are newer but still crappy.

Do your research, don't follow advice blindly and you'll build the knowledge base to recognize accurate information.

If you're interested, you can check out more [broscience advice](#) that you should not listen to.

What should I wear to the gym?

The truth is, the clothes should make you feel comfortable and allow you to move freely. They should fit you well and be somewhat stretchy.

Everything else is irrelevant. Whatever you like and feel comfortable in. I do recommend you get a nice pair of long shorts to wear on days when you deadlift. You can also get a pair of deadlift socks. The barbell is going to scrape your shins and if you're not used to it, it can be uncomfortable.

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On to the shoes.

For a beginner whose main activity in the gym is to lift weights, I recommend getting a pair of shoes with a flat, non-compressing sole. Think [Chuck Taylor's](#).

You shouldn't use running shoes for squatting. The sole is squishy and it compresses under load which makes you feel unstable.

The same applies for the deadlift. Doing them in shoes with a thick sole creates an unnecessary deficit and makes the lift even harder.

After a while, you can consider getting a pair of Olympic shoes with a raised heel for your squats.

Should I buy any accessory items for the gym?

As a gym newbie, you don't need any yet.

Weight belt? Not yet.

Knee sleeves? Yea, pass them up for now.

Gloves? Make sure you pick a color that matches your purse.

The only accessory items I recommend for a newbie are a pair of headphones and a resistance band for your warm-up and to help you [learn how to do pull ups](#).

Are there things I should or shouldn't do at the gym?

It's necessary to know proper gym etiquette. Otherwise, you can make yourself look dumb and get some dirty looks from the regulars at your gym.

Without any more rambling, here are the key rules:

1. Be clean: shower and wash your clothes

This one is a no-brainer but I can't tell you how many times I've had to endure some people's stench.

If you're working out outside and you're alone, do whatever you want. But for the gym, take regular showers, especially during the warmer months. Also, never wear the same shirt or tank top a second time after you've already sweat in it.

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2.Rerack the weights you've used

This is one of the most common gym crimes. Walk into most gyms and I guarantee you'll find some dumbbells on the ground and loaded barbells with nobody using them.

First off, no one should have to rerack the weights you've used.

Secondly, it doesn't take much work and it will take you 1 minute to do it.

Thirdly, say for example you finish your sets and you go on about your workout. Then, a girl comes along and wants to use the equipment only to see that weight on it.

I've seen it time and time again: a girl struggling to take down someone else's 45-pound plates from the leg press just so she can do her sets.

Be a stand-up person and re-rack everything you use.

3.Don't leave sweat on equipment

If you're the type of person who sweats a lot, take a towel with you in the gym. Either put it over the equipment before sitting/laying on it or wipe the sweat off after you're done.

It's nasty and nobody wants to sit in your sweat.

4.Don't block people's view of the mirror

When someone is using the mirror, it's impolite to stand in front of them and block their view.

Mirrors are there to serve a purpose: to help you see yourself doing the exercise and judge your technique.

So when someone is using the mirror, don't stand in front of them.

5.When in doubt, ask first

Alright, let me paint a picture for you:

You're at the gym, doing barbell bench press. You leave the bench for a moment to grab a drink of water. You come back and you discover that someone's un-racking the weights from your bench.

Not fun. You wouldn't like it to happen to you, so don't do it yourself.

If you see a piece of equipment, especially a plate-loaded one, and you're not sure whether someone is using it or not, ask around.

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It will save you time and potential embarrassment from having to re-rack the weights once the person using the equipment confronts you.

6. Ask for a spot if you need to

One of the worst things I've seen in the gym on different occasions is someone getting pinned down by the barbell on a bench press.

Most of the time, the person is testing their one repetition max without a spotter.

If you're about to do a heavy set, it's always advised to ask for a spot from someone.

Most people are happy to help and no one wants to rush in and pick the barbell up from your chest.

7. Don't start conversations with people who are doing a set/wearing earbuds

People wearing earbuds at the gym likely don't want to socialize, so leave them be.

If you need to ask them something about equipment or what not, do so. But don't try and interrupt their session so you can chat about that day's weather.

Also, it's very impolite to interrupt someone during a set to ask them something. Wait until they're done.

8. Appreciate the random advice and move on

As a gym newbie, you'll get some unwanted advice from gym bros.

Thank them for it and move on.

Whether the advice is good or bad, don't think much of it. Unless it comes from your coach.

9. Avoid giving advice to anyone, unless they're in immediate danger

This rule ties in with #8, but this time you're on the giving end.

Remember this: people don't like getting advice (even if it's beneficial) from someone they don't know.

They could be dogmatic, or have very low self-esteem and avoid getting criticized at any cost.

Whatever the reason, save yourself the trouble and avoid giving advice to people.

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Only do so if they're in immediate danger of hurting themselves.

A few years back, I gave unwanted advice to some kid who was doing these incredibly scary deadlifts. I'd like to think that he's not snapped up now, but who knows.

10. Don't talk on your phone while in the weights room

The music in most gyms is so loud that you couldn't have a proper conversation on the phone, to begin with, but even if you could, don't.

No one wants to listen to your phone conversation so take it outside.

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