

A close-up, high-angle photograph of a young woman with blonde hair tied back, smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a teal-colored, ribbed tank top. In her right hand, she holds a clear plastic cup filled with a vibrant green smoothie. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The overall mood is healthy and positive.

# Your Health

SWIMSUIT SEASON READY

# Know Your Gym Benefits

A gym membership is an investment in your health. It can also, however, save you time and money you would otherwise spend on other services.

To get the most out of the money you spend on your gym membership, be sure to take advantage of all the benefits it offers.

We all think of the typical gym membership benefits: access to weights, exercise machines and group fitness classes. Dig deeper into what's included, however, and you'll find added benefits that could save you time and money.

## INCLUDED BENEFITS

Many gyms provide equipment and supplies for your workout, such as foam rollers or mats, and they may even loan out equipment such as racquetball rackets and balls, spin shoes, swim caps or boxing gloves. This means you don't have to lay out a lot of cash for equipment to try out a new sport.

Ask which educational and motivational programs your gym offers. They may include contests to keep you motivated to stay active or go to the gym, such as a pedometer challenge, or weight loss or boot camp challenges to inspire groups of people to stick with their diet and exercise goals. These pro-



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grams are typically offered free or for a modest fee, and might even include the advice of a personal trainer or dietitian.

Also check the gym's calendar for free seminars or webinars to help you learn more about health, exercise and nutrition.

Some gyms also offer social events, such as a family pool day or healthy cookout. In

addition, look for flyers for member appreciation days, when you might be treated to additional perks, or bring-a-friend days when you can bring a friend to work out for free.

## FOR-FEE SERVICES

Your gym likely has paid offerings that can simplify your schedule. For example, some

gyms offer massage therapy or martial arts classes, which can be convenient since you're already visiting the gym.

An emerging trend in the gym market is paid blood testing. According to Shape Magazine, the results can offer insight that you might not get during regular doctor visits. "The difference is that your doctor is mostly interested in

diagnosing dysfunction in your body, and being 'not sick' is not the same as being 'healthy,'" writes Charlotte Andersen in Shape.

The tests examine metrics such as vitamins, enzymes, lipids, blood counts and more. Included with the results are recommended diet and exercise changes, as well as advice on which supplements to take.

# Setting Fitness Goals

What are your fitness goals? Do you want to look great in a bathing suit? Do you want to improve your overall health or be less winded when climbing stairs? Having a goal in mind can help motivate you to stick with a diet and exercise plan.

There are as many different health goals as people, and no one goal is right for everyone. Work with a personal trainer to determine what you want to accomplish and set realistic goals.

The National Institutes of Health recommends writing down short- and long-term goals before you begin working on getting fit. Short-term goals should include steps you will take over the next one to two weeks. Long-term goals should outline where you'd like to be in six months or more. Meeting your short-term goals can inspire long-term success.

Here are three goal-setting steps from the NIH.

**1. Write down your short-term goals.** Write down at least two short-term goals. This can include buying workout clothes or shoes, joining a gym or signing up for a fitness class. If you're already active, set a goal to do



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more physical activity, increase the amount of weights you lift or try a new workout. Self Magazine encourages people to set their own unique goals, about which they are excited and can realistically achieve. The goals should also be specific. For example, rather than making a goal of being stronger, set a target of doing a certain number of pushups.

**2. Write down your long-term goals.** Write down at least two long-term goals. These are the goals you will measure your long-term progress against. Be realistic when setting long-term goals. You won't be able to do every yoga pose in a couple of weeks. Set measurable, achievable goals.

**3. Revisit your goals.** Goals can only be helpful if you continuously revisit them and

track your progress. As you feel stronger and have more energy, you might decide to step up your goals a notch. According to Self Magazine, you might need to be flexible about your definition of success. If it becomes apparent that a goal is unattainable, set a smaller, more achievable goal, or break the goal into steps.

Another factor in your abili-

ty to achieve your goals is having support. This can be a personal trainer, an online or phone-based health coach (check to see if your health plan or employer offers this service), or a supportive friend or family member. Talk to them about your goals so they can help you stay accountable and be there to discuss challenges you face along the way.

# Weightlifting for Women

The American College of Sports Medicine recommends that adults do resistance training at least twice per week, with 8 to 12 repetitions of 8 to 10 exercises targeting all major muscle groups.

Only 20% of women — less than the population as a whole — get enough resistance training, despite the fact that research has found benefits for women's physiological, psychological and social health, according to a National Institutes of Health study. Weight lifting has particular benefits for women, in the way of decreasing the risk of osteoporosis. So why do women shy away from weights?

## THE BARRIERS

Barriers to women doing more resistance training included being too busy, lack of desire, and too much discipline required to continuously take part in a regular resistance training program, according to the study.

The NIH study found that access to a women's weight lifting class or women's only area of a fitness center might help women overcome barriers to lifting weights. It also found that better education about the benefits could help overcome barriers.

Even Johnston admits to



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having been intimidated by her gym, “the dirtiest, most poorly-lit box filled with men who had huge, rippling arms and teeny little legs,”

Speaking of how she had long avoided weightlifting before trying it for the first time, Johnston pinpoints another possible concern for women. “I was terrified that if I touched a weight, I’d suddenly look like peak Arnold Schwarzenegger, so I just skipped it.” She reassured women that after four years, she had gained no more than

10 pounds of muscle.

## GET STARTED

Writing for *Self Magazine*, weightlifter Casey Johnston says, “Some training programs are ridiculously convoluted, [but] you can make working out endlessly complex or actually pretty accessible and simple.” Weightlifting exercises can start out as easy as carrying groceries or putting your luggage into an overhead bin, because they are modeled after such motions, Johnston writes. Before long, even smaller

women can do impressive weightlifting. “You might surprise yourself!” writes Johnston. “But either way, absolutely everyone starts somewhere.” She recommends that women “learn from trusted sources, start slow, master the movements before throwing on weight, and see where it takes you.”

*Self Magazine* suggest starting with just your body weight, such as doing squats and pushups, then progressing to using resistance bands, kettlebells and slider disks. The goal

should be to challenge yourself each time you exercise. Then start weightlifting a couple of days a week.

Any weightlifting workout should begin with a warmup, according to *Self*. This should include using a foam roller to loosen up muscles, as well as stretching.

In any event, don't ditch your cardio workouts. *Self* advises people to stick with the CDC recommendation of 150 minutes of light-to-moderate cardio or 75 minutes a week of high-intensity cardio.

# Group Fitness Etiquette

Taking a group fitness class can be fun and keep you motivated to keep working toward your fitness goals.

If you're new to group fitness, there are some points of etiquette to know to make the most of your group fitness class.

## BASIC ETIQUETTE

The same etiquette rules that apply to most of life apply in the gym. These include being on time, not being pre-occupied with your cellphone, being considerate of others' space and cleaning up after yourself. Try to avoid leaving early, but if you must, stay near the back of the class so you don't disrupt others when you leave. These are good habits to have and will help you form relationships with your classmates and instructors.

## ATTIRE

Wearing the right clothes for the activity will keep you comfortable and keep the class moving. You don't want to have to keep stopping to adjust straps or tie a shoelace. Come prepared with the appropriate attire.

## HYGIENE

In a group fitness class, you'll be up close and personal with strangers. Keep the inevitable body odor in mind.



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Use an antiperspirant and don't over-perfume. Any strong odor will make it more difficult for your classmates to do the deep breathing needed when the workout intensifies.

## SHARE THE GYM

Group fitness classes are often scheduled back-to-back. Keep this in mind and refrain

from excessive chit-chat before and after class. Wait for the class before yours to empty before entering the room, and leave promptly after gathering your equipment and belongings. It's also considered rude to carry on conversation while the class is in session. Others around you are focusing on fitness.

Conversations are best saved for later.

## STAY WITH THE CLASS

Busting out your own moves or trying to show up the instructor can earn the scorn of your classmates quickly. When you sign up for a class, you know what you're getting. Stick with the rest of the class.

One exception is if you are injured or unable to perform an exercise. Then it's OK to do a modified version.

## BE KIND

Some classes have a learning curve. Don't laugh at or mock others who are still getting the hang of it. Offer to help them or offer encouragement.

# The Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean Diet is ranked No. 1 among diets by U.S. News and World Report. With its roots in the foods of the Mediterranean Sea region, it's easy to see how this diet can be both delicious and healthful.

There's no calorie counting, and the diet includes lots of fresh foods. Fat isn't off the menu, and the menu is massive. The diet gets its flavoring from Mediterranean spices, and wine is allowed (in moderation).

The diet boasts benefits for weight loss, heart and brain health, cancer prevention, and diabetes prevention and control. If you're sold, here's how to get started.

## THE FOOD

A Mediterranean diet includes fruits and vegetables (7 to 10 servings a day), breads and other whole grains such as potatoes and brown rice, as well as beans, nuts and seeds. Olive oil is a primary fat source, and moderate amounts of low-fat dairy, fish and poultry are allowed.

Things to avoid include added sugar (soda, ice cream, syrup), white bread and refined wheat pasta, trans-fats, refined oils such as canola and soy-bean, processed meats, such as sausages and hot dogs, and processed foods.

## MEAL PREP

Because the Mediterranean diet relies heavily on fresh foods, meal prepping might help you stay on the diet during busy weekdays. You can base multiple dishes during the week on the same ingredients or fully cook meals ahead of time. For example, you can



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cook high-protein whole oat pancakes on the weekend and freeze them separately, then defrost one each morning for breakfast. You also could cook a batch of brown rice and use it as the grain in dinner on multiple weeknights.

## SNACK IDEAS

Although hunger shouldn't be a problem due to the high protein intake on the Mediterranean diet, there are plenty of ways to snack without breaking the rules. Some ideas include olives, cheese cubes, nuts, seeds, roasted chickpeas, dried fruits, tomatoes and avocados.

## TIPS AND TRICKS

Here are some tips from the Mayo Clinic for being successful on the Mediterranean Diet.

- You don't have to leave bread and pasta behind. Simply switch to whole-grain versions.
- Replace the red meat in your favorite dishes with chicken, fish or seafood.
- Add more seafood into your diet, aiming for twice a week.
- Use olive oil instead of butter whenever possible. Instead of spreading butter on a piece of bread, dip it in olive oil.



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# New Workouts to Inspire You

If you're new to exercising or looking to shake up a worn-out routine, look to new trends in fitness for a workout to invigorate you.

Today's trendy workouts offer unique takes on getting in shape, from crawling like a tiger to putting your own flourishes on dance moves. Cue the thumping bass.

## POUND

Founded by drummers former drummers Cristina Peerenboom and Kirsten Potenza, Pound harnesses the fun of making music into a body-sculpting workout. Using Ripstix (a pair of slightly weighted drumsticks) and a booming beat, the payoff can be huge. According to Shape Magazine, the workout can help you burn up to 900 calories in just 45 minutes. The Pound workout is hitting gyms across the country. If you're not into group fitness, however, you can purchase Ripstix and Pound DVDs for an at-home workout and exercise to the beat of your own drum.

## ANIMAL FLOW

Animal Flow combines movements from different types of exercise and dance, including gymnastics, acrobatics, Parkour, capoeira and breakdancing, to work multi-



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ple muscles at once. Designed by Mike Fitch, the workout combines primal positions that stay close to the ground (handstands, crawling on all fours, crab walking) along with stretches and choreography and is designed to hone power, flexibility, mobility and coordination. Look for the program to be offered by personal trainers and at gyms.

## GROOVE

If you'd like to get moving

but don't care for a lot of structure, Body Groove is for you. In her popular YouTube videos, dancer Misty Tripoli gives you loose guidance on how to perform dance moves, but it's all about your own style. "How many different, funky moves can you walk?" she asks viewers in her "Super Funk" workout video. "How much personality can you muster up here?" In "Pop Rocks," she encourages viewers, "When your foot wants to

come up off the ground, turn it into a kick. Not when mine does. When yours does." The personalization makes the exercises easily adaptable for all ability levels, and all you need is YouTube and a wide open space to get your groove on.

## BOKWA

If you know letters and numbers, you can do Bokwa. Founder Paul Mavi insists that you don't need to be a dancer

to tackle his South African dance-inspired workout. The steps are choreographed to map the shape of a letter or number on the ground. The 1, the L and the 3 are some basic moves. Aside from that, you are free to add your own dance style to the workout, which is always set to high-energy, trendy music. When a Bokwa group fitness class kicks off, it looks like a highly choreographed dance party — with a lot of sweat.

# Don't Dread the Swimsuit

When swimsuit season is approaching, many of us begin to notice the extra pounds we've packed on over the winter months. If you've let a few extra pounds slip on, toning exercises can help you trim up.

You don't need a lot of expensive equipment to do the job. Just your own weight and a few supplies will suffice.

## **PUSHUPS AND SQUATS**

There's no need to get fancy. Tried-and-true pushups and squats can help tone your arms, chest, glutes and thighs. With each of these exercises, form is important to hit the intended muscles.

For a push-up, start with your arms a little wider than shoulder width apart. Keep your back and legs straight as you raise and lower your body, lowering almost until your chest touches the ground, and avoid locking your elbows when you push back up.

For a perfect squat, keep your feet hip-width apart, with your knees over your ankles, and sit in an invisible chair. Squeeze your abs to avoid arching your back. Add dumbbells to increase the intensity. WebMD recom-



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mends aiming for three sets of 8-12 repetitions.

## **WEIGHTS**

Using a pair of dumbbells can add intensity to your workouts. Toning Timesaver: Deadlifts target the back, butt, and legs. Here's how to execute a deadlift, according to Web MD. Stand with your legs

slightly wider than shoulder-width. Lift the weights, keeping them close to your body. Raise your shoulders and hips together, and avoid arching your back. Do one set of 8-12 reps.

## **PILATES**

If you're looking for flat abs, look to pilates. Pilates focuses

on strengthening your core muscles and toning your hips and buttocks. Attend a class or use a video to get started.

## **WATCH YOUR DIET**

If you've set a goal to drop a few pounds by swimsuit season, consider a low-carbohydrate diet. Even a few small

changes can help you shed pounds. You might consider giving up beer, which can cause bloating, or limiting your salt intake.

Look for ways to add protein to your diet, such as grilled fish and chicken. Beware protein bars and drinks, which can contain large amounts of carbohydrates.