
Fitness centres – how to choose one

Summary

- Reputable fitness facilities tend to be registered with Fitness Australia, the peak industry body, or run by the local council or another management organisation.
 - Fitness providers should operate in accordance with industry standards, the Fitness Australia Code of Ethics and the Business Principles and Guidance for Fitness Businesses developed by Fitness Australia.
 - If you haven't exercised in a long time or have a chronic medical condition, complete the adult pre-exercise screening tool, and see your doctor or allied health professional for advice and support before embarking on any new physical activity program.
 - Ask a lot of questions so that you will have accurate information. Making an informed decision can help you choose a facility or program that fits your needs and will support your efforts to achieve long-term health benefits.
-

There is an enormous amount of choice available in the modern fitness industry. It is important that you spend time researching what is available so that you can make an informed choice.

If you haven't exercised in a long time or have a chronic medical condition, complete the **adult pre-exercise screening tool** developed by Fitness Australia, Exercise and Sports Science Australia (ESSA) and Sports Medicine Australia, and see your doctor for guidance before starting any new fitness program.

Benefits of joining a health or fitness centre

A good quality health or fitness centre provides a safe environment for exercise and is supervised by trained personnel. It will enable you to use specialist exercise equipment and offer the kinds of activities you like and that meet your personal fitness goals.

With a little research and patience, you can find a fitness service that caters for your individual needs.

Choosing a fitness centre or service

Before you join up, shop around and visit several facilities (or locations if you are choosing outdoor programs). Take a tour and ask questions. Observe the classes and programs that they run. Take notes on what you like and dislike about the facility. Talk to existing clients.

Key points to consider include:

- Is the fitness centre, gym or outdoor provider a well established business?
 - Is the location easy for you to access?
 - Are the staff members friendly and helpful?
 - Is there a good selection of the type of equipment you want to use?
 - Is the business extremely busy at the time of day when you want to attend?
 - Is the equipment clean and well maintained?
 - Does the business have lockers for your valuables?
 - Are there child-minding facilities (if this is a service you need)?
 - Is there plenty of parking or public transport?
 - Can you put your membership on hold, or use it in a different location?
 - Do they carry out pre-exercise screening to assess your needs?
 - Does the business participate in regular assessment of the quality of its services?
 - Does the business seek feedback from its consumers on the quality and safety of its services?
-

Location of the fitness centre or service

Factors to consider:

- For your fitness routine to be successful, exercise has to be convenient. You're more likely to use a club or service if it is close to either your home or workplace. Joining a club or service that isn't convenient will mean you are more likely to find an excuse to stop going. If lunchtime is the only time you have to exercise, consider joining a fitness centre or program near work.
- Check opening hours and timetables to find out whether you can attend the activities you want.

Activities, programs and equipment at fitness centres

Factors to consider when you are checking out a fitness centre include:

- Make sure the fitness centre caters for the kinds of activities you like and that meet your personal fitness goals – for example, personal training, free weights, aerobics classes, pilates and swimming.
- Boredom can set in if you don't have enough variety in your exercise program. Make sure the fitness centre has a variety of equipment, programs and classes that will keep you interested.
- Consider how important it is to you that the centre offers other facilities such as child minding, parking or a coffee shop.

Support and staff at fitness centres

The facility or fitness provider should have professional staff with the appropriate education and training related to the duties they perform.

Factors to consider include:

- Do staff members have appropriate training and certification that is recognised by the fitness industry? Exercise professionals should hold current registration with a recognised industry association such as **Fitness Australia**, the peak industry body.
- If you have special needs, do staff understand your health conditions and can they meet your needs? Are they able to modify equipment, facilities and programs if required?
- Is the gym floor constantly supervised or monitored by electronic surveillance in the case of 24-hour facilities?

Atmosphere and image of the fitness service

Make sure the club or service provider offers a comfortable environment for you. Would you feel relaxed and at ease while working out in this setting? Is it somewhere you would feel self-conscious and embarrassed?

As you tour the club or observe the program, pay attention to details such as:

- the age spread of the other members
- whether there are more men or women attending
- the general fitness level of other members
- what clothes participants are wearing – for example, stretch tights or tracksuit pants
- the type and volume of music played
- the sorts of posters, pictures or branding on display
- how clean the facility, change rooms and other amenities are
- the state of the equipment. Is it in working order? Too many 'out of order' signs may indicate poor maintenance.

Take a class before you join the fitness centre

Don't join up just yet. Visit the club or service at the times you intend to work out and check out numbers and wait times for equipment. Take a casual class (or two) during the times you plan to attend.

Fitness facilities and business practice

Any fitness centre or provider should operate in accordance with:

- **Fitness Australia's Code of Ethics**
- fitness industry codes of practice (a national code of practice is currently being developed by Fitness Australia)
- **Fitness Australia's Scope of Practice** for Australian Registered Exercise Professionals
- consumer and business laws.

It's also important to protect your investment by joining a centre or provider that is reputable and financially sound.

Features to consider include:

- Find out how long the fitness service has been running. Generally speaking, a long-established service is less likely to go out of business.
- Reputable, quality fitness businesses tend to be registered with Fitness Australia or are run by the local council or another management organisation.
- Before you join, talk to current members about their experiences with the club or service.
- Make sure the fitness centre or service has adequate insurance, in case you are involved in an accident.

The benefits of exercising with a registered fitness business include:

- Registered exercise professionals hold appropriate qualifications and have a current first aid certificate.
- Registered fitness businesses are required to abide by **fitness industry codes of practice** (a national code of practice is currently being developed by Fitness Australia) and **Fitness Australia's Business Principles and Guidance** document.
- Registered fitness businesses possess professional insurance cover.
- Registered fitness businesses are often acknowledged as a fitness provider by private health insurers who offer a fitness rebate.
- A number of registered fitness businesses will also go through regular quality accreditation processes and will display their accreditation branding.

Signing up with a fitness centre or service

When you decide to take out a fitness centre membership or enrol with a fitness service, factors to consider include:

- Find out exactly what the membership fee is and what it includes. Are there different membership options and are all the fees for services clearly stated? You should receive a fully detailed membership agreement.
- Ask questions. Will you have to pay extra for childcare and towels? Some fitness centres offer discounts to concession holders or for members who want to train at off-peak times.
- Is a fitness assessment and personalised exercise program part of your membership? Is your program reviewed on a regular basis and will extra charges apply? Do new members receive an orientation and instruction in using the equipment and facilities?
- Does the facility provide you with a written set of rules and policies that govern the responsibilities of members, as well as the facility?
- Many clubs have a variety of payment options – find a payment schedule that suits your budget and take advantage of any sign-up specials.
- Do you have a 'cooling off period' after purchasing the membership, just in case you change your mind?
- Find out if you can suspend or transfer your membership.

Make sure a fitness centre is the right choice

Before you join a fitness centre or program, you might also want to stop and think if it's the right activity choice for you.

Factors to consider:

- Don't think that spending money on a gym membership will motivate you to exercise. It probably won't. Joining a fitness centre or program doesn't make you fit and healthy – exercise does.

- Evidence suggests that expert supervision does enhance the health benefits of exercise.
- If you're not interested in the activities offered through fitness providers, find activities that you think are fun and convenient. You may enjoy inline skating, dancing or playing sport, or consider speaking to a personal trainer who offers outdoor or mobile services.
- Getting started with an exercise routine doesn't have to involve machines or equipment either. Walking is one of the easiest forms of exercise available, and it's free.

Where to get help

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Staff at fitness centres or other fitness services
- **Fitness Australia** Tel. **1300 211 311**

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Fitness Australia

Content on this website is provided for information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not in any way endorse or support such therapy, service, product or treatment and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. The information and materials contained on this website are not intended to constitute a comprehensive guide concerning all aspects of the therapy, product or treatment described on the website. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions and to ascertain whether the particular therapy, service, product or treatment described on the website is suitable in their circumstances. The State of Victoria and the Department of Health & Human Services shall not bear any liability for reliance by any user on the materials contained on this website.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2019 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.