

A woman with brown hair tied back, wearing a yellow t-shirt, is lifting a black dumbbell with her right arm. She is looking towards the camera with a focused expression. The background is a blurred gym setting with other people and equipment.

BEYOND GYM ANXIETY:

How to Get Moving

by Yelena Kibasova, NETA-GEI

You've set a goal to start exercising and even invested in a fitness membership, but every time you plan to head to the gym, you talk yourself out of it. If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. Many people experience gym anxiety.

This anxiety often stems from a feeling of uncertainty. Whether you don't know what to expect when you walk in or have no idea what you should be doing, the unknown can be a barrier to starting. Furthermore, for some, there's a compounding fear of making a fool of oneself when trying something new. Beyond uncertainty, you might have a fear of being in crowds or having to see yourself in the mirrors that line the walls of most gyms.

Often, we are told to "just get over it and go." While this advice typically comes from a positive place of encouragement, it doesn't deal with the underlying fears that are associated with going to the gym. It's important to find ways to break through your gym anxiety so that you can feel comfortable and at home in the gym.

“Over time, you may end up with a group of accountability buddies who will motivate you during class and expect to see you weekly.”

Gain Confidence Through Education

To overcome the fear of not knowing what to do, seek out education. Many people have an unrealistic expectation that they should be fitness experts when they start working out. Just like any new hobby, you'll need time to learn the basics and practice what you've learned before you become proficient. The pressure to be or look like other gymgoers often keeps people from starting. It helps to keep in mind that those gym 'experts' were also beginners at one point.

How can you learn more? Most gyms have fitness professionals who can teach you how to use their equipment. They may also offer free introductory training sessions. Many gyms offer free group fitness classes as well. If you're new to group fitness, come early to a class and let the instructor know you're new. "Most fitness professionals are really good at subtly modifying their movements during class, so they are accessible to everyone," Raghu says.



Find a Gym That Fits Your Style

A great starting point is finding a gym that works with your personal preferences. Once you look beyond the well-known gyms in your area, you may discover there are many other options within a few miles of your home. If you don't like crowds, you may benefit from joining a small, 24-hour gym that allows you to come and go as you please. On the other hand, if you don't like the idea of independent workouts, you may enjoy a gym that has a built-in community, such as a prominent senior program.

Brandon Raghu, CPT, Life Time Personal Training Manager, suggests joining fitness coffee clubs, walking groups and group fitness classes to start. "Post-COVID, we've seen that most people succeed by joining communities," he says.



Join a Group Fitness Class

Group fitness classes often repeat weekly with the same instructor, giving you time to get comfortable with the format and progress at your own pace. It also gives you a chance to learn the instructor's style or to seek out another class that better fits your style. Furthermore, the same students often attend a class week after week, giving you the opportunity to make in-gym friendships. Over time, you may end up with a group of accountability buddies who will motivate you during class and expect to see you weekly.

Start Small and Progress at Your Own Pace

Starting small is crucial to any sustainable fitness plan. For someone new to the gym, your first goal may be to just enter the gym for 10 minutes a couple of days per week. The act of walking in and spending a little time in the building can help build confidence and establish a routine. Over time, you can build up to 30 minutes per session and eventually one hour. Remember, it's important to get out of your comfort zone to succeed. "What I really encourage people to do is pick something you are comfortable with and do that every day for 30 days. Then slowly find something new; don't try to experience everything at once," Raghu says.

What to Do If You Can't Get Over Your Gym Anxiety

Everyone's fitness journey has its own pace, and maybe you're not quite ready for the gym. If that's you, there are many options for fitness that won't require you to get a fitness membership. When seeking out exercises that will suit you, always turn inward. The quickest way to get anxious about fitness is to copy the workout your friend, coworker or spouse is doing. If you absolutely hate the idea of running but continue to join your best friend for her morning runs, that's a sure way to burn out on fitness.

Find what you love! As with anything, this may take some trial and error. Start by journaling for a few minutes about what fitness means to you. Ask yourself some questions: What type of movement doesn't feel like exercise? What brings me joy? Do I enjoy working out alone or with a group? What do I need to stay accountable? What barriers will I have to work through? Once you have these on paper, jot down two or three forms of exercise that may suit your individual needs and go out and try them!

Whether you decide to join the gym or find other forms of exercise, be kind and gentle with yourself. Every new hobby takes practice and time and should start without the intention of a specific outcome. Fitness is no different. When you stop expecting specific results and start enjoying the self-care and process of moving your body, that's when you can truly fall in love with exercise.

About the Author:

Yelena Kibasova, NETA-GEI, is a 14-year bariatric post-op patient, certified fitness instructor and professional writer. She has spoken at numerous obesity-related conferences over the years, including ObesityHelp, Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) and Weight Loss Surgery Foundation of America (WLSFA). She is passionate about fitness for all levels and sustainable weight maintenance plans that combine physical, mental and social well-being. She coaches clients on habit transformation for weight-loss and regain. You can visit her website, MoreThanMyWeight.com, to learn more about her.



Everyone's fitness journey has its own pace, and maybe you're not quite ready for the gym. If that's you, there are many options for fitness that won't require you to get a fitness membership.





ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO [OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN](https://obesityaction.org/join)

info@obesityaction.org

(800) 717-3117 | (813) 872-7835 | Fax: (813) 873-7838



@ObesityActionCoalition

@ObesityAction