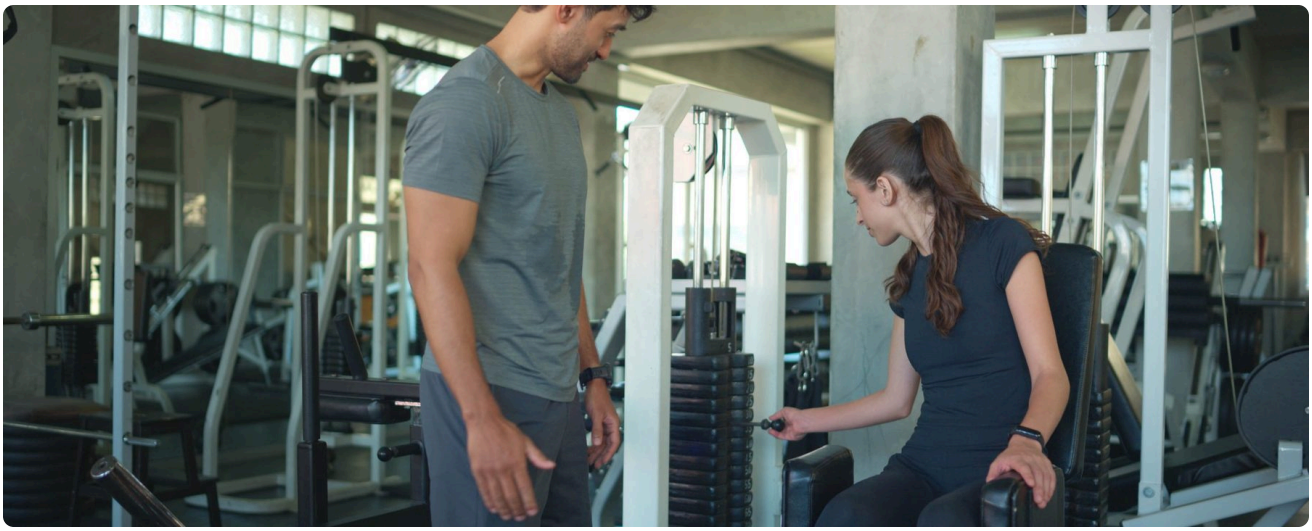
Your first day at the gym

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Your first visit has one job: learn your way around and finish an easy session. Building strength starts on your second visit.

Why it matters: For many people, walking in the door is the hardest part. Knowing what to bring, what to ask and what to do once you're inside takes most of the guesswork out of day one.

Go deeper

Before you go:

- Ask the front desk when the gym is quiet. A less crowded floor makes it easier to look around and try machines without waiting.
- Check the gym's busy times in a map app. Many map apps show a "popular times" chart for each location, so you can pick a quiet hour before you go.
- Ask whether new members get a free tour or equipment orientation, and book it if they do.
- Decide your session in advance and write it down. The plan below is enough for day one.
- If you have heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes or another condition, read the health conditions article and check with your doctor first.

What to bring:

- Comfortable clothes you can move in and closed-toe athletic shoes.
- A water bottle and a small towel.
- A lock, if the lockers need one.
- Your phone, to log your workout in **Plan my workouts**, or a notebook.
- Your membership card or ID.



When you arrive:

- Take the tour or ask a staff member to show you the layout: locker rooms, water, cardio machines, weight machines, free weights and stretching space.
- Ask about house rules, such as wiping down equipment and time limits on cardio machines.
- Ask a staff member to show you how to adjust one machine. The same seat and pad adjustments work on most of the others.
- Read the instruction placard on each machine. Most show the starting position, the movement and which muscles it works.
- New to machines? Read the guide "How to use a weight machine" before you go.

Your first session

Plan for 30 to 45 minutes:

- **Warm up for 5 to 10 minutes** on a treadmill or stationary bike at an easy pace.
- **Do 4 to 6 machines** that cover your whole body. A good set: leg press, chest press, seated row, lat pull-down and shoulder press.
- **Do 1 or 2 sets of 10 to 15 reps on each.** Choose a weight you could lift several more times. Day one is for learning the movements, not for pushing hard.
- **Rest a minute or two between sets.**
- **Finish with 5 minutes of easy walking.**

Why machines first: they guide the path of each movement, adjust quickly, and let you change the weight with a pin. That makes them a simple place to learn. Free weights can come later.



Write it down: record each machine's seat setting, the weight you used and your reps. Next time you can set up quickly and add a little weight or a rep or two.

Gym etiquette

- Wipe down equipment after you use it.
- Put weights and attachments back where they belong.
- If someone is using a machine you want, ask "How many sets do you have left?" or "Can I work in?" Working in means you use the machine while they rest, then swap back. It's normal and most people say yes.
- Training with a friend works the same way: one lifts while the other rests, taking turns on the same machine.
- Rest away from the machine if others are waiting. See "Gym etiquette."

- Give people lifting weights some space, and don't walk directly in front of someone using a mirror.
- Take phone calls off the gym floor.



After day one

- You may feel some muscle soreness in the days after a new type of exercise. This is common and fades as your muscles adapt (see "Why your muscles get sore"). Light activity such as walking is fine.
- Sharp pain, joint pain, chest pain, dizziness or unusual shortness of breath is different. Stop exercising and get it checked.
- Plan your second visit within a few days. Repeat the same session, then follow your program as it adds weight, reps and exercises.

Your first-day checklist

1. Check busy times in a map app, and book a tour if one is offered.
2. Pack clothes, shoes, water, towel, lock, ID and a way to take notes.
3. Take the tour and learn how to adjust a machine.
4. Warm up for 5 to 10 minutes.
5. Do 4 to 6 machines for 1 or 2 easy sets of 10 to 15 reps.
6. Cool down with a 5-minute walk.
7. Log your weights and reps in **Today's workout**, and note your seat settings.
8. Book your second visit.

Related guides

- How to use a weight machine
- Gym etiquette
- Your first month

Related articles

- How much exercise is enough?
- The strength training dose
- Exercise with a health condition
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