



Beat “Gymtimidation”

By: Sharon Liao

Clear the mental hurdles that keep you away from fitness centers.

To get physically fit, you may first need to work your mind. Fear, insecurity, and other mental barriers are leading reasons why people with arthritis don’t exercise, research shows. And there’s nothing like a gym to make you feel exposed, letting that fear bubble up. “For many people, the gym is intimidating,” says Greg Chertok, a sport and exercise psychology consultant at Telos Sport Psychology Coaching in New York and New Jersey. He recommends these tips to clear common mental barriers.

Barrier: “I’m self-conscious.” First, find a gym you feel comfortable in. For example, some women feel more at ease in a gym that caters to them, such as Curves. “Take a tour to get a feel of the place,” says Chertok. “Ask about programs and classes geared for beginners.” Also, inquire when the gym is the least crowded. If you’re still hesitant, try exercising with a buddy; it can boost your confidence, and working out with others can keep you accountable and motivated. Ask a friend to join you or sign up for a class at your gym.

Barrier: “I don’t know how to use the equipment.” Look for a gym that offers introductory training sessions for new members, says Brianna Burke, a personal trainer and the chronic disease and wellness support coordinator at the YMCA of Central Ohio in Columbus. Or, she adds, “sign up for a few sessions with a personal trainer,” who can demonstrate how to use the machines.

Barrier: “I’m out of shape and everyone is so fit.” Reframe your thinking. Instead of comparing yourself to others, focus on your progress instead. “Or use them as inspiration,” says Chertok. Research shows that other people’s habits can influence your own, so working out in an environment with motivated people may help you stay on track. Also, ditch the baggy sweats and invest in a workout outfit that you feel good wearing, adds Chertok. Looking the part may deliver a confidence boost.

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