Hi Alice,

Do you have any suggestions for me on losing weight? I feel so intimidated going to a fitness center because of the looks I get. I really do. It seems like an individual has to be thin to go into fitness centers now-a-days. I should say some of them are that way.

Thanks

Answer

Dear Reader,

You are already on the right track. Exercising has countless benefits for health, happiness, and if it matters to you, appearance. It sounds as though you know what you need to do, but want some suggestions on where to do it.

It's true, some fitness centers can feel intimidating. However, most everyone at the gym has had that same feeling at one time or another; it's common to feel nervous about joining a new gym, regardless of body size. In reality, fitness center users come in all shapes, sizes, and ages. If you have already found a facility, know that many fitness centers offer a complimentary training session or two to show you how to use the machines and help you devise a workout plan. A quality facility hires employees with a full understanding of "gymphobia." Investing some time to get oriented can help relieve some of the anxiety you experience during future visits as you'll be able to strut right in and jump into your workout.

If you're still searching for a fitness home, consider that YMCAs, YWCAs, local community centers, and independent gyms often feel more down to earth and less intimidating than many larger, chain gyms. As you are considering which facility to join, it's certainly fair to ask for a tour and a trial membership. Visit the location at different times of the day as early morning exercisers may seem very different than a mid-afternoon or late evening crowd. Look around for members who you feel are similar to you and ask them about their experience. Another option may be a college in your neighborhood. Some colleges offer community members use of their facilities for a nominal fee. Many cities offer rec centers which offer weights, cardio machines and classes, and pools for a low membership fee. Don't forget about exercising...
outside: running, biking, hiking, and walking immediately come to mind. Fresh air does the soul good.

If you've ever played a sport or wanted to learn a new one, consider joining a team or a league. There are a wide range of options, from dodge ball or softball to tennis and bowling. Leagues often offer options for beginners and seasoned athletes alike with the added bonus of meeting some new friends.

Just like with your first day of a new job or school, you start out not knowing many people and not being sure of what to do, but, within a short time, all that changes. Going to a gym, a team practice, or to the park to run won't be too much different. Think of your "gymtimidation" reduction efforts as a part of your entire workout ? the more you stick with it, the easier it will get. And remember, health clubs are places to get and stay healthy ? not beauty pageants or Olympic competitions. Gym'ers who disagree might consider shaving a few pounds off their egos.

Finally, remind yourself that working out is something you've committed to do. Schedule it on your calendar and grab a partner ? you can encourage and motivate each other.

Alice!

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