



## Welcome to the club

The gym can feel like an intimidating space, only for the super fit and strong. But once you push past that anxiety, you just might find a fun, motivating environment for you to work towards your goals. Psychologist Glenn Mackintosh, founder of Weight Management Psychology, shares some advice.

### Ready to change your mindset?

In his free ebook 'The Missing Piece', Glenn shares seven mindset hacks for improving your eating, exercise, weight and body image. Download and get more advice at [weightmanagementpsychology.com.au](http://weightmanagementpsychology.com.au)

**“Remember, the gym is for everybody. You have the right to improve your health and fitness, and any good gym will support you from where you are starting.”**

Start small and start with the exercises you like. Anything you do is beneficial, so celebrate your small wins, knowing that over time they will build into big ones.

#### **Understand your discomfort**

There are several reasons why people feel uncomfortable about going to the gym, so it's important to understand what your barriers are. Negative body beliefs, which come in the form of self-judgments (“I'm too fat”), comparisons to others (“I'll never look like that”), and worries about others' opinions (“What is she doing here?") can give rise to a lot of anxiety.

If you're not used to navigating the gym floor, using the equipment, or exercising in general, you may lack a bit of confidence. And when we feel intimidated when we're doing something, it's easy to lose motivation and want to head for the door.

On top of this, we naturally have anxiety around approaching new environments, so some of it is just the newness of the place until we become familiar with it.

#### **Let go of assuming people will judge you**

While we often assume the experienced gym goers are judging us mere mortals, the reality is probably the exact opposite. To develop such a high level of skill and fitness (not to mention physique) the most seasoned gym goers have to put their blinkers on and focus solely on themselves. They are so into their reps, sets, and PBs they probably don't even realise you're there, let alone have judgments about your presence.

Remember, the gym is for everybody. Whether you're a competitive body-builder training 12 hours a week or it's your first time stepping through the door, you have the right to improve your health and fitness, and any good gym will support you from where you are starting.

#### **It's okay to work up to it**

If you're feeling too self-conscious about your weight or fitness level, there's nothing wrong with warming yourself up to exercising in public with your own fitness regime first. You can start in the comfort of your own home with exercise DVDs, walk around the backyard, or even buy some exercise equipment to get started.

At some stage though, it's important to work through your self-consciousness and get out there in the world. Just remember that you have a right to take care of yourself at any age, shape or fitness level. If you notice any thoughts that tell you otherwise (“What will other people think?") remind yourself they are only thoughts – let them come and go as they please as you tie your shoes and get out the door!

#### **It only *feels* like a secret club**

The gym can feel like a secret club with unspoken rules known only known to its members. The thing to remember though is that it's actually an open club that's pleased to welcome new people. In fact, gyms spend a lot of time, money and energy trying to get you to become a member.

As with overcoming any fear or anxiety, the key is to be brave and put yourself in the new situation until you get used to it. Many of my clients are surprised how quickly they will pick up the rules, learn how to use the exercise gear and get comfortable in their new environment.

As they become more familiar with their surroundings they often find the gym is not so daunting and can even be fun. Sometimes some of those 'secret members' even end up becoming new friends – which I guess means you're now a part of the club!

#### **Forget what you 'should' be achieving**

So often we place unnecessary pressure on ourselves based on what we think we 'should' be achieving. We compare ourselves to the muscle man who is there when we arrive and still there when we leave, our personal trainers (whose full time job is health and fitness), or who we were 10 years ago. We get advice from well-meaning health professionals, Instagram models and diet culture telling us we must completely transform ourselves, and quickly!

But focusing on all of the 'shoulds' builds pressure that can undermine our confidence, lead to extreme and unsustainable exercise routines, and ultimately sabotage our long-term success. Rather than focusing on what you 'should' be doing, focus on what you want to do.

#### **You don't have to do it alone**

Social support can really help overcome those initial gym nerves. Bring a friend with you for some moral support or enlist a personal trainer to show you all you need to know to get started. These supports also help you with commitment to sessions and can form a great comfort zone to venture out from when you're ready.

#### **Create positive associations**

Think about your relationship with exercise. Are you complete strangers? Are you foes (because every time you're together you feel like you're being punished)? Is it a drag that you only do to get the results? Or is it a friend that you enjoy spending time with?

As well as focusing on the benefits of the gym, try to develop positive associations with going there. The best way to do this is to focus on having fun – do more of the stuff you like, less of the stuff you don't like, and work at the pace that suits you as a unique individual.

#### **Get active with discounted gym passes**

Medibank members with Hospital and Extras cover can receive up to 25% discount on casual passes to a wide network of gyms around Australia. Learn more at [medibank.com.au/gymbetter](http://medibank.com.au/gymbetter)