

DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE IN THE GYM

We've all been there at least once while on the road to increasing our fitness levels – whether a novice or expert, everyone's been hit with less-than-ideal levels of confidence at the gym a time or two in their lives. Perhaps you're a brand-new gym goer ready to get started on your health and fitness journey feeling overwhelmed with the cornucopia of machines, free weights, and lifting accessories galore. Maybe you've fallen off the fitness wagon and are feeling intimidated about starting over again. For me, it was after I'd moved to start a new job, which of course meant locating a new gym (one of the top five things on my "to-do" list). As someone who is no stranger to treadmills, dumbbells, and an overly cramped weight room, I wondered in anxious anticipation what my new workout facility would encompass on a Saturday drive while making the rounds to three separate potential gyms in my new city. Regardless of how you're feeling – anxious, overwhelmed, intimidated, or a shaky mix of all three, leveling up your confidence is key in leveling up your health goals if you're planning on becoming a gym regular.

So where do we start on constructing confidence for the gym? You may have heard the saying, "The proof is in the planning." and really, this sentiment couldn't be truer. If you think you're lacking confidence now, before you've stepped foot in a gym, think about how you'll feel walking in and nervously looking around at the equipment and the people who seem to know what they're doing, while you aimlessly walk through the rows of gym machinery. This is a waste of valuable time on your end, and can result in you walking out feeling defeated, moving yourself further away from reaching your goals. Instead, take the time now to do a little research. Find *reputable* (this is imperative) information on starting a workout program such as the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), Mayo Clinic, and the Physical Activity guidelines for Americans are simply a few ideas to get you started. Take screenshots, print out the program, or if available, download a fitness app so that you can refer back to it during your gym time. I always, always, always, write down my workout and store it in my Notes app on my phone. I also keep track of sets, reps, how I was feeling that particular day, did I need to increase or decrease my weight or reps, etc. If I think the gym will be incredibly busy on a certain day (think holiday breaks or at the beginning of the new year), I will keep in mind a contingency workout plan that will involve modifications in the event machines are taken, or all of the dumbbells have mysteriously vanished. You see, you can never be too prepared, and I can tell you from personal experience this will help not only your confidence but the quality of your workout too.

If after planning your workout you still don't feel like Wonder Woman getting ready to tackle any challenge ahead of you, I suggest using the buddy system. This can either look like you bringing a friend to exercise with, or taking advantage of your gym's personal trainer. Typically, many gyms will provide some type of deal or offer where, you get one, free-of-charge introduction-type appointment with a trainer to assess whether you two would be a good fit and have similar goals in mind. They can also help to familiarize you with the gym equipment they have available.

Another personal strategy I use is going to the gym during their not-as-busy times. Back in college, I started working out in the wee hours of the morning when several of my grad school buddies and I were trying to find a time to work out together. While I hated the initial buzzing of my phone going off alerting me it was time to get up before the dawn, I soon realized upon getting to the gym that the majority of people on campus also preferred to sleep. Meaning, the gym was nearly empty and for the

most part, our group had our choice of equipment to use. I'm a morning gym-goer now for several reasons being, one, it's typically not quite as busy as other times, two, I find like-minded people there (i.e. They simply want to get a workout in before work, and most don't have a strong desire to stop you mid-workout to chit-chat with your limited, precious time.), and three, I find that my motivation and discipline begins to wain after being at the office all day and the likelihood of getting in a solid workout past 5 P.M. starts to rapidly deplete.

Remember too the little things that can potentially help you to build up your confidence – a rocking playlist or motivating podcast can certainly help you work through those last few difficult reps or help you channel your inner Wonder Woman (Hello, Diana.). If it helps, put together a cute workout outfit, while still making sure you're comfortable and that your clothing is functional (Emphasis on the functional part – I've tried on many a cute workout pant only to discover they're practically see-through, and have even heard them rip slightly when I practice my squat form in the dressing room – yikes.) If you can't move in your outfit, they why in the world would you wear it to THE place for movement?

The last thought I have on developing confidence at the gym is to focus on yourself. Perhaps that sounds vain, but you know what? Everyone else there is doing the same thing – focusing on, and trying to better themselves. I know it can feel like all eyes are on you, especially when you're the new kid on the block, but if you stick with your gym routine, you'll only carry that title for a week or so. If it helps, take it from the girl who after going to the gym for over 10 years still trips on the corner of benches when carrying her weights back to the rack or stumbles over an orphaned pair of dumbbells when some super special person decided they were above re-racking their weights. I look around instinctively, waiting for the laughter to erupt, and everyone's heads are down in their phones, on the mirror looking at their form, huffing and puffing mid-squat, you get the idea. Honestly, there's no laughter in sight – probably because any faithful gym attendee knows it'll eventually happen to them as well. If you must, laugh a little at yourself then go finish up your workout.

All in all, I'd say the biggest trick to developing gym confidence is acting like you've already got it. Wear comfortable, functional clothes, have a great playlist ready and waiting for you to push play, and please, please, please plan your workout ahead of time. Focus on you, your goals, your health, and if you can do these things rather consistently you may not recognize that confident gym-goer in the mirror. Hint: it's you.