

Proper Gym Etiquette

How to Play Well with Others While Working Out

-- By Leanne Beattie, Health & Fitness Writer

I hadn't been to the gym for a few days and was really looking forward to a good workout. It was just after six in the evening and the place was packed but a recumbent bike was available so I signed up for 30 minutes and hopped on, anticipating a nice cardio workout. Imagine my disgust when I sat back against the seat and was immediately soaked with the previous user's sweat. Yuck!

Just like you had to learn good table manners as a child, there are also some firm rules to follow for sharing a workout space with others. Even if you feel like you're in your own little world when you're exercising, keep in mind that others are trying to use that space too. Here are some general guidelines that will make your next gym experience pleasant for everyone:



Equipment Etiquette

- **Clean up after yourself.** Always bring a towel—and use it. There's nothing worse than getting covered in someone else's sweat. Towels help keep surfaces clean, dry and germ-free. Most gyms have cleaning supplies available—use them to wipe down your equipment before heading off to the next station.
- **If you take something out, put it away.** Have you just finished using a set of free weights? Then put them away. Leaving dumbbells, bands, exercise balls and other equipment on the floor is a tripping hazard and makes it difficult for other members to find the equipment they need. Don't drop the weights when you're done either—it's loud and very distracting for others around you.
- **Learn to share.** Don't hog the equipment for yourself. If you're in the middle of a circuit but taking a short break, let others slip in between sets to save time. Don't leave your towel on the machine and walk away expecting the machine to still be available when you return. Everyone has a right to use the equipment, not just you.
- **Practice patience.** Don't rush others. If someone is obviously using a piece of equipment, don't ask if they are almost done. Wait until he or she takes a break and be prepared to wait or use something else in the meantime.
- **Be on time.** Many gyms lightly enforce 30-minute time limits for cardio machines during peak hours. If your gym is busy, respect that limit and don't go over. If you want a really long cardio workout, avoid the gym during the busy times, like the after-work rush between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m.

Personal Protocol

In addition to using equipment properly and respectfully, the way you carry yourself also affects those around you. If every gym member abided by these personal rules of conduct, the gym would be a more pleasant place for everyone! So do your best to:

- **Lower the volume.** While exercising to music is motivating and fun, blasting your MP3 player at maximum volume is not. Respect the people around you and turn down the music—not everyone wants to hear your playlist.
- **Turn off the cell phone.** Are you there to exercise or to chat? Keep your private life private by shutting off your phone while you're at the gym. Some facilities have rules against bringing phones

inside, especially camera phones. Respect the people around you and leave your phone in the car while you're working out.

- **Share the water fountain.** If you're filling up a huge water bottle, check to see if anyone is waiting to take a quick drink and let him or her go first. Don't spit in the fountain or use it to dispose of your used chewing gum.
- **Don't offer unsolicited advice.** Unless you are a certified personal trainer, don't go around correcting other people's form without permission. If someone asks you how to perform an exercise, don't give them advice unless you're absolutely sure—injuries happen all the time and your wrong suggestion could end up hurting someone.
- **Dress appropriately.** Torn, dirty clothing doesn't belong at the gym—nobody wants to see your underwear peeking through your ratty sweatpants. Similarly, cover your body appropriately up top too. The gym isn't the place for women to show off their cleavage (always wear a well-supporting sports bra too), or for men to go shirtless (talk about spreading sweat and germs onto equipment).
- **Wear deodorant.** Exercising will make you sweat and that can cause body odor. Wear a good deodorant/antiperspirant to keep odor to a minimum, but don't spray yourself with perfume before hitting the gym—some people are very sensitive to scent and get headaches or migraines from the chemicals.

Above all, always respect the people around you and follow any posted rules that your gym may have. If you see someone blatantly breaking the rules, ask them politely to correct the behavior or talk to the facility manager about the problem. If you've noticed a situation, others probably have as well. Getting along with others at the gym just takes a little common sense. By following the rules of gym etiquette, you—and the exercisers around you—can all enjoy a great workout with minimal aggravation.