

5 Things to Remember When Returning To The Gym After COVID-19

1. Do Your Research

Learn more about what your club has done during the closure and what policies have been put in place for your safety, as well as the safety of its employees. You can generally find this information on the club's website or social media channels; if it's not there, make a phone call or arrange a face-to-face visit. Things to ask:

- What deep cleaning took place during closures and the new cleaning and disinfecting policies that will be in place (e.g., what products are they using, how often areas are cleaned, who is responsible for the cleaning)
- Capacity limits and if reservations are needed for the gym as a whole or the specific area where you plan to spend your time (e.g., group fitness studio, weight room floor, functional area, cardio equipment)
- What entry policies are in place for employees and exercisers to help decrease the spread of the virus (e.g., temperature scans, daily health questionnaires, signs and symptoms, tracking of those using the building at the same time in case a member reports being diagnosed after exercising on site)
- How policies for staff and patrons will be enforced

2. Consider Covering Up

Wearing an appropriate mask in public is recommended. At the very least, wearing a face covering will help you avoid touching your face after coming into contact with equipment or surfaces in the gym. While equipment is sure to be spaced out, certain places in a gym present more of a challenge when trying to avoid entering another's air space. With exercise, the rate of respiration is sure to be elevated, which seems to increase the risk of transmission. If you have any pre-existing respiratory or cardiovascular conditions, it is advised you take caution. High-intensity exercise is also another concern when wearing a mask. (My HIIT SPRINT class was cancelled due to this concern.) If you haven't been working out as much during this pandemic, ease back into exercise.

3. Be Time and Space Conscious

Most facilities are using reservation systems for entry and exit times, equipment usage and classes. If your club is not, try to schedule your workouts when it is naturally less crowded. Alternatively, seek out other facilities that utilize reservations, have more space or fewer members. The less time you spend in the gym, the less exposure you will have, so get in and get out. Be prepared to use minimal areas of the club and as few pieces of shared equipment as possible. Equipment should be spaced apart, and a minimum of 6 feet of distance between members should be maintained. Be sure to avoid natural congregation points (e.g., restrooms, front desk, outside studios).

4. Sanitize, Sanitize, Sanitize

Although the club takes care of facility and equipment cleaning, you should take control of your personal sanitizing. Start by using hand sanitizer in the car after putting on your mask and before entering the building; after check-in, rewash your hands. Be sure to sanitize any equipment before and directly after use. Weight-lifting or surgical gloves, though not required, may give you peace of mind. If you need mats, bands, stretch straps, foam rollers or similar high-use, hard-to-clean equipment, consider investing in your own to bring with you or use at home.

5. Consider the Risk and Alternatives

Exercise good judgment and do what's right for you. If you are uncertain about returning, have underlying health conditions, worry about being in frequent contact with others who are at high(er) risk whom you could possibly affect, take your time in returning.

It has never been easier to find at-home exercise options, whether it's walking in your neighborhood, riding a bike, using an exercise app, or taking video-on-demand or live-streaming classes. Ask your club how they are supporting exercisers from afar. You can also tap into your personal network, as friends, colleagues, family and Facebook groups are likely to have a few ideas for you.

Getting back to the gym and a little bit of "normalcy" can be physically and mentally beneficial. Use your own best judgment and do what is right for you. Keep in mind, there are other ways you can get moving! Think *outside* the box (or gym).

Source: American Council on Exercise (ACE)

Targeting Wellness, LLC Debby Schiffer