

Form, form, form.

A general rule of weight training is form before weight. If you can't lift something with good form, you shouldn't try. Using good form and technique while in the gym is one of the best ways to keep yourself free from injury. Use strict form with every exercise and not only will you get better and stronger at each exercise, you'll also have more longevity than most of the other lifters in your gym and spend less time on the bench from injury.

Use a spotter or gym partner.

There are **many reasons** for training with a partner but one of the best is that it keeps you safe while training. A spotter, especially on exercises such as the bench press or squats, where you're potentially under a lot of weight, should be mandatory when lifting heavy. (And this is without even mentioning how a spotter can help you achieve lifting goals.) A spotter can also check your form to make sure you're not setting yourself up for a major injury and step in before it's too late.

Stay hydrated.

A no-brainer, right? You get hot and sweaty at the gym and you need water to replenish what you sweat out. Plus, some gyms are not as air-conditioned as you might like. Whether you like to sip on an intra-workout or just have your jug of water with you, you need to be taking in fluids while you work out.

Be aware of your surroundings.

We often like to be 'in the zone' while working out: earbuds in, eyes focused straight ahead and concentrating on getting the work done. However, not paying attention to what's around you can be bad news. You don't want to walk into someone's dumbbell raises or get kicked in the head by a hanging knee-up because you were too focused on making a beeline for the squat racks. Keep your eyes open.

Put your weights back.

This overlaps with gym etiquette but re-racking your weights goes a long way towards making the gym a safer place. Leaving heavy weights on the floor is just asking for accidents and injury. Ever stubbed your toe on an errant dumbbell in the gym? Imagine falling head over heels from tripping on a barbell that hasn't been re-racked.

Always use a towel.

This one isn't about injury but general health. By now, everyone should know this one but it bears repeating: make sure you always have a towel with you to put on any equipment you use (and to wipe yourself down if you're dripping with sweat) to protect yourself from **germs**. Most gyms have it as a requirement of entry anyway, but you do still see the occasional idiot making the gym less safe for others. In addition, be a good gym member and spray the equipment you've used (including the weights) with disinfectant. Your fellow gym-goers will thank you.

Warm-up.

No, you don't have to stretch for hours on end or roll around on a piece of foam (though that **can help**), but at the very least you should help your body acclimate to what you're about to put it through. If you're using the **cardio machines**, start out slow and gradually build up to a run. If you're going to be doing a **HIIT** (high-intensity interval training) style session, still start out with a light jog to get the blood moving around your body. When it comes to weights and pin- or plate-loaded **machines**, put your body through the motions it's going to be performing with a light weight, so your muscles switch on and engage. This seems obvious but when we're pressed for time in the gym, it's easy to forget.

Take your time.

We all have busy lives and it's a fast-paced world. It can be hard to find the time to even get to the gym, let alone give it the concentration it requires. What makes it worse is that we always want everything yesterday. This is never more true than in the gym. However, it's much better to take the time to get it right than to rush in and get injured. Don't try to keep up with your gym partner if they're going heavy and you're struggling. Wait until you're ready. This goes for the long-term too: understand that fitness is a lifelong pursuit — the rewards come gradually, not all at once.

Only lift weight you can handle.

Related to the previous point, building strength takes time in the gym, so don't rush into going too heavy while you can't handle it. If you're a beginner wanting to test how much you can lift, you're liable to overdo it and, forgetting to use good form, and potentially giving yourself an injury that will take a long time to recover from. (This is another reason having a spotter is important for safety.) Find safer ways to test your strength — improving your form, looking up ways to test your maximum weight with a calculated rep scheme — and you'll be fitter and healthier in the long run. Be safe; strength will come.

If you're not sure, ask someone.

This might be the one that almost nobody does but the one with the most potential to make gyms a safer place. Maybe you need a spotter for your last set. Better to ask than to try it yourself and get yourself injured. And nobody wants to be the person in the gym who doesn't know how to do an exercise or use a piece of equipment properly, but if we just swallow our pride and ask a more experienced member, we might just learn some things. Gym members might seem scary sometimes but we're all there for the same reason — reach out and ask if you need help.