Hi Alice,

Do you have any suggestions for me on losing weight? I feel so intimidated going to a fitness center because of the looks I get. I really do. It seems like an individual has to be thin to go into fitness centers now-a-days. I should say some of them are that way.

Thanks

**Answer**

Dear Reader,

Being and staying active has countless benefits for your health, happiness, and if it matters to you, appearance. However, some fitness centers can indeed feel intimidating. You might be a little relieved to know that most everyone at the gym has had that same feeling at one time or another; it's common to feel nervous about joining a new gym, regardless of body size. In reality though, fitness center users come in all shapes, sizes, and ages. It may just be a matter of finding the facility that fits your needs and makes you feel comfortable. But, you may also look beyond a fitness facility to meet your weight loss goals.
If you have already found a facility, you might inquire about a complimentary training session or two to show you how to use the machines and help you devise a workout plan (many facilities offer these to new members). Investing some time to get oriented may help relieve some of the anxiety you experience during future visits as you'll be able to strut right in and jump into your workout. If you're still searching for a fitness home, consider that YMCAs, YWCAs, local community centers, and independent gyms often feel more down to earth and less intimidating than many larger, chain gyms. As you're considering which facility to join, it's certainly fair to ask for a tour and a trial membership. You may also try visiting the location at different times of the day as those who get there in the early morning hours may seem very different than a mid-afternoon or late evening crowd. Consider looking around for members who you feel are similar to you and ask them about their experience as you figure out what location and what time of the day might be the right fit for you.

It's also worth mentioning that fitness doesn't have to be achieved within four walls — have you considered taking your workouts outside? If you enjoy having others around you or prefer a guided practice for motivation, you might see if there's outdoor activity groups or meet-ups (a simple internet search may help you find some in your area) where you can get your sweat on al fresco. You might also check with your local parks and recreation department for low-cost or free events such as hiking, tai chi, or yoga. And, if you've ever played a sport or wanted to learn a new one, there may be local a team or a league you could join. There are a wide range of options, from dodge ball or softball to tennis and bowling. Leagues often offer options for beginners and seasoned athletes alike with the added bonus of meeting some new friends.

No matter what you choose to do moving forward, consider this: just like the first day of a new job or school, you often start out not knowing many people and not being sure of what to do. But, within a short time, all that typically changes. Going to a gym, a team practice, or to the park to run usually won't be too much different. With that in mind, you might think of your "gymtimidation" reduction efforts as a part of your entire workout — the more you stick with it, the easier it will get. And remember, health clubs, fitness centers, and gyms are places to get and stay healthy — not beauty pageants or Olympic competitions. Gym'ers who disagree might consider shaving a few pounds off their egos.

Alice!

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