



The gym is a jungle of shiny weight stacks, clanging dumbbells, and more than a few sleeveless beasts screaming through every rep. Then there's the gridlocked cardio area (um, does anyone enforce the 30-minute-limit-while-people-are-waiting rule?), the dozens of group fitness classes — and what's up with that 24-ingredient concoction they dole out at the juice bar? It's no wonder women eschew this chaos for a simple elliptical routine. But when you're shelling out an average of \$55 a month to exercise, you should be getting more for your money. We asked fitness club owners, doctors, nutrition gurus, and trainers to share their insider info so you can make the most of every dollar.

### Cardio

**Pick the right tunes.** Keep your body moving at a fat-frying pace with songs between 130 and 170 beats per minute, says Corry Matthews, a Gold's Gym Fitness Institute expert trainer. For reference, Kelly Clarkson's "Since U Been Gone" clocks in at about 130 and the Beastie Boys' "Sabotage" at around 170. Go to [Dynamix Music](#) and [Power Music](#) to find CDs tailored to different types of workouts. Or download user-submitted playlists at [fitPod](#).

**Change up your footing.** On bikes, stair steppers, and elliptical machines, push with different parts of your feet. "Push with your toes and give your quads an extra workout," says Lindsay Dunlap, creator of the Fat Fighters program at Sports Club/LA in New York City. "If you push with your heels, you work

your butt and hamstrings more."

**Don't waste time in line (Part 1).** Favorite machine taken? Try something different. You might get even better results.

**Popular: Treadmill**

**Alternate: Stepmill** (old-school escalator-like thingy) If you increase the speed and stand tall, you'll burn up to 200 more calories an hour than you would on a treadmill, says Eddie Carrington, a personal trainer at Bally Total Fitness in New York City. "We have five in our gym, and rarely are they all taken."

**Popular: Elliptical trainer**

**Alternate: Recumbent bike** "They both decrease stress on the knees, shins, and ankles," Carrington says. "On the bike, use 2- or 3-pound dumbbells, punching forward at shoulder height to simulate the elliptical's push-pull arm movement."

**Popular: Stationary bike**

**Alternate: Rowing machine** Rowing burns 40 to 50 percent more fat than cycling because it also works the upper body.



## Free Weights

**De-bug your dumbbells.** Neoprene weights may be easier on your hands than metal ones, says Kelly Reynolds, Ph.D., a microbiologist at the University of Arizona. But they're also more hospitable to bacteria and viruses. So either stick with old-fashioned dumbbells or bring along a 4-ounce bottle of Clorox Anywhere (\$2, **Clorox**) and spray the weights and benches. "It has a chlorine bleach that kills 99.9 percent of bacteria on contact, but it doesn't stain fabrics and doesn't need to be wiped," Reynolds says. Other disinfectant sprays and wipes can take 10 minutes to kill germs.

**Jockey for the adjustable bench.** By varying the angle of the bench, you'll hit the muscle from every direction. For example, to work the mid, upper, and lower chest equally, do one set of dumbbell chest presses on a flat bench. Incline it to 45 degrees for the next set, then decline it to 30 degrees below flat for the final set.

## Weight Machines

**Get a bonus ab workout.** Work your core when using upper-body machines by placing your feet close together or lifting them off the ground, Dunlap says. On lower-body machines, tone your midsection by folding your arms across your chest or clasping your hands behind your back instead of grabbing the handles.

**Be super.** Get your heart pounding (read: burn more blubber) by working two muscle groups back to back with no rest in between (also known as supersetting). Target opposing muscle groups for balanced results without overworking any one muscle, says Todd Durkin, personal trainer and owner of Fitness Quest 10 in San Diego. He recommends pairing bench presses with lat pulldowns and leg extensions with leg curls.

**Don't waste time in line (Part 2).** This time, ditch the machine and try these just-as-challenging moves.

**Popular: Hip Adductor/Abductor** (works inner and outer thighs)

**Alternate: Wide-Stance Squat** Grab two 5- to 8-pound dumbbells and stand with legs wider than your shoulders, feet turned out 45 degrees. Bend your knees and bring the dumbbells straight down in front of you so they're between your legs. Slowly lower your hips until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Then press up to standing. Complete 12 reps.

**Popular: Lat Pulldown** (works back and biceps)

**Alternate: One-Arm Dumbbell Row** Grab a 3- to 8-pound dumbbell in your right hand and stand facing a bench. Get in a lunge position, then bend at the waist and place your left palm on the bench. Let your right arm hang at your side. Pull your elbow toward the ceiling until the dumbbell reaches chest level. Lower and repeat. Do 12, then repeat on the other side. Complete three sets, resting 30 to 60 seconds in between.

**Popular: Leg Press** (works glutes, hamstrings, and quads)

**Alternate: Lunge with Dumbbells** Studies show that lunges work the glutes 20 percent harder than leg presses. Hold 5- to 10-pound dumbbells and lunge with your right foot forward. Press back up through your right heel. Step your right foot back in line with your left, then repeat, lunging with your left leg. Alternate until you've done 12 reps on each side. Do three sets, resting 30 to 60 seconds in between.

### Group Fitness

**Sign up for class.** Need motivation? A 2006 A.C. Nielsen survey of 1,000 group fitness participants found that they visited the gym an average of 2.9 times a week. Gym members who don't take classes show their face about half as often, according to the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association.

**Choose wisely.** Spinning, step, and Tae Bo classes burn as many calories as 45 minutes of running at a 10-minute-mile pace, according to a 2006 study in the *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research*. While great for bone and muscle building, body-sculpting classes burn far fewer calories. Best bet: Tae Bo, which tones your body and zaps mucho calories.

### Juice Bar

**Java up.** Contrary to popular belief, caffeine doesn't dehydrate you, according to a 2005 study in the *International Journal of Sport Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism*. "A cup of black coffee before a workout can boost energy levels and increase calorie burn," says Molly Morgan, R.D., founder of Creative Nutrition Solutions in Vestal, New York.

**Bounce back fast.** You could waste time and brain power calculating the perfect carb-protein combo for your postworkout fix. Or you could just grab a 12-ounce glass of low-fat chocolate milk. "It has the ideal ratio of carbs to protein for recovery," says Molly Kimball, R.D., of Ochsner's Elmwood Fitness Center in New Orleans.

**Avoid protein boosts.** "On average, a 130-pound woman needs 71 to 100 grams of protein per day," Morgan says. Many shakes pack 40 grams or more — too many on top of a typical nonvegetarian diet. Plus, these juice bar specials tend to be high in calories. And extra calories — even "healthy" ones — get stored as fat.

### Locker Room

**Suss out the towels.** Unless they're bleached, community towels can be dirtier than Chris Rock's stand-up routine. Germs survive regular washing, according to Reynolds — so ask the manager whether the gym's laundry always uses bleach. If not, bring your own towels.

**Secure your stuff.** Any gear worth owning is worth locking up. Pick up a Masterlock G.I.o. padlock (\$14, masterlock.com), which has a cool easy-to-spot LED-lit dial and is twice as strong as an ordinary combination lock.

**Warm up before your massage.** Step into the sauna for 10 minutes to prep for a recovery rubdown. "By dilating the peripheral blood vessels and increasing circulation into the muscles, you're helping your massage therapist be more effective," says Gary Brazina, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon in Los Angeles.

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