

# CITIZEN-TIMES.com

## What to look for when choosing a gym

[Nanci Bompey](#)

January 15, 2008 12:15 am

Libby Kyles made the commitment to try to lose weight as part of the Lighten Up 4 Life challenge, but she is having trouble finding a gym where she can exercise.

“One of the biggest problems is probably the hours,” said the third-grade teacher at Isaac Dickson Elementary School. “I want someplace that has personal trainers and a support system. ... I’m not trying to buff up, just get in shape.”

Finding a gym can be a daunting task this time of year, when people are looking for a place to start their New Year’s resolutions to lose weight, get in shape and be healthier.

Local facilities say they see from twice to five times as many new members in January. This year, those numbers are even higher at the YWCA, said the organization’s fitness director, Susan Macdonald.

“With the messages (about getting healthy) and Lighten Up 4 Life, people are getting a motivator on a regular basis,” she said. “I see people more recently sticking to an exercise program longer and working out harder, and the people signing up now are ready to make a change, a behavioral change. In years past, they signed up because that’s what they thought they were supposed to do.”

But whether people will stick with these changes is yet to be seen. Only about 40 percent of people stick with an exercise program after 90 days, Macdonald said.

The most important way to ensure that you will stick with an exercise routine is finding a gym that is close to your home or office and one where you feel comfortable, said Jay Clinton, an exercise specialist with Mission Hospitals’ HeartPath.

“If someone joins the gym and doesn’t like the feel of going in there, they’re not going to go back,” he said.

Tips for selecting a fitness center  
Narrow down your interests

The first thing to look for when choosing a gym is deciding what you are interested in doing, said Karyn Kattermann, fitness coordinator at Biltmore Fitness. Some gyms offer more classes than others, some have pools, and others offer amenities like racquetball. Other gyms offer child care or have a coffee bar, which might make them more expensive but may also mean you would work out more often.

“You want to do research on what you like and what gyms have to offer,” Clinton said.

Other gyms like Ladies Workout Express, Butterfly Life and Curves are for women only and offer an exercise circuit that can be done in a short amount of time, usually 30 minutes. Some of these clubs also offer group classes and a more extensive gym.

“The biggest advantage is most women we cater to have not worked out in a long time,” said Ladies Workout Express owner Kim Hreha. “They want a place where they can feel totally comfortable. They want a nonintimidating environment.”

#### Look at the classes

Kattermann said when choosing a gym with group fitness classes, look at its total offering of classes. Kattermann said it is a good idea to choose a gym that offers a comprehensive program of different classes, including cardiovascular, flexibility, strength training and mind-body classes.

“In order to become fit, you really need a comprehensive program,” she said.

Kattermann said some gyms offer more free-style classes, where instructors change routines often, while others offer more franchise or branded classes, which tend to be more repetitious.

Along with a comprehensive offering, also look for classes that sound fun to you. Some gyms offer dance-based classes like zumba, hip-hop and belly dancing.

#### Go for a visit

Once you’ve narrowed down different gyms, it is important to visit them at the time of day when you will be using them, said Peggy Emory, a personal trainer at Training Partners.

She said this will let you see how long it takes to get there, how crowded the parking lot is, how crowded the gym is and what type of people are working out there.

“You should choose a gym that is convenient for you, because if it isn’t, you aren’t going to use it,” she said.

Most gyms let prospective members come for a one-day free trial, so if you are looking at gyms, go in with workout gear ready to exercise.

“Go to facilities and try them out, and look for what you’re interested in,” Clinton said.

He said many gyms get crowded around this time of year, which can turn some people off. But he said it is important to check to see if the gym has a good method of signing up for a machine and if it has time limits. While there may be a line for a treadmill, if a gym has a good way of controlling the demand, the lines might move quickly.

#### Check certifications

Class instructors and personal trainers should be certified. Certifications mean that instructors and trainers know proper technique, which will reduce

the likelihood of injury.

Kattermann said instructors should have primary group certification, which comes from groups like the American Council on Exercise or the Aerobics and Fitness Association of America. She said instructors should also have specialty certifications for the type of classes that they teach.

“It doesn’t mean that you are a good instructor, but it does mean that you are safe,” she said.

Emory said the best certifications for personal trainers are from the American Council on Exercise, the American College of Sports Medicine and the National Academy of Sports Medicine.

“You can go online and get a certification. It’s not regulated yet,” Emory said, adding that she is also wary of in-house certifications.

#### Avoid contracts

Clinton said it is a good idea to avoid signing a yearlong contract at a gym.

He said gyms can close or you could move, and it is hard to get out of the contract. Clinton advises looking for a gym that will let you pay month to month.

“Never pay upfront if you can avoid it,” Clinton said.

He said a lot of gyms will also negotiate their joining fees or waive the fee altogether. Also ask about discounts. Some health clubs offer discounts to local businesses or members of various organizations.

#### Cleanliness counts

Cleanliness, or lack of it, can be one factor that separates one health club from another. Emory said to check out everything from wastebaskets to the locker room to make sure it is a clean facility.

#### Overall atmosphere

The bottom line is that you want a gym where you will feel comfortable. Look for gyms that have friendly workers who know your name and say hello. Look at the type of people who are working out.

If you don’t feel welcome or feel intimidated, you won’t want to go work out.

“It’s got to feel good to you,” Emory said.

#### Once you join

When you have settled on a gym, it is a good idea to take advantage of a free personal training session or orientation session that most health clubs offer. A personal trainer can explain how to use the machines properly, how to start a basic weight training program, and he or she can design a good workout for you based on your exercise goals.

Clinton said he recommends that gym newcomers start slowly. He said people often overdo it on the first day, which makes them sore for a few days and deters them from exercising.

“Start off at a reasonable pace and for the right amount of time,” Clinton said.

He recommends starting with the basics like the treadmill and stationary bicycle before moving onto the elliptical and rowing machines. For people who want to start a weight-training program, Clinton recommends starting on weight machines before advancing to free weights.

He also recommends starting with more basic classes like aerobics and step aerobics before classes that involve weights. Clinton said beginners should ask which classes are best suited for them.

“If you are starting out, don’t think it is just going to be one thing. Stay open-minded to different activities,” he said.

Some deals local gyms are offering this month:

- Biltmore Fitness, 711 Biltmore Ave. Half off joining fee in January or the option to pay in full for one year with no joining fee and a 13th month free.

Monthly fee: \$39 for an individual.

Classes only: \$7 per class or a \$50 punch card for 10 classes.

Amenities: Group classes, Kinesis wall, child care, smoothie bar.

More information: 253-5555 or [www.biltfit.com](http://www.biltfit.com).

- YWCA, 185 S. French Broad Ave. Joining fee is waived in January.

Monthly fee: \$38 for an individual.

Amenities: Group classes, pool, child care

More information: 254-7206 or [www.ywca.org](http://www.ywca.org).

- Asheville Racquet and Fitness Club, 200 Racquet Club Drive and 1000 Brevard Road, Suite 175. No initiation fee in January.

Monthly fee: \$39.95 for an individual when you sign a one-year agreement, \$44.95 for a month-to-month membership. A full membership that includes tennis and use of the outdoor pool is \$84.95 for an individual. Members can use both facilities.

Classes only: \$10

Amenities: group classes, gymnasium, racquetball, child care, sauna, massage, juice bar at the South Asheville location. Group classes, child care by appointment, sauna, massage and day spa at the Brevard Road location.

More information: 274-3361, 665-2323 or [www.ashevillerracquetandfitnessclub.com](http://www.ashevillerracquetandfitnessclub.com)

- Asheville YMCA, 30 Woodfin St. Pay the day for January. New members pay the amount corresponding to the day they join.

Monthly fee: \$45 for an individual

Amenities: group classes, child care, swimming pools, racquet ball, gym

More information: 210-9622 or [www.ymcawnc.org](http://www.ymcawnc.org).

- Ladies Workout Express, 802 Fairview Road, Suite 100 and 1854 Hendersonville Road. Free enrollment and first month free for January.

Monthly fee: \$30

Amenities: group classes, child care, sauna, tanning at the Fairview Road location.

More information: 298-4667 or [www.ladiesworkoutexpress.com](http://www.ladiesworkoutexpress.com)

---

Use of this site signifies your agreement to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

Copyright 2008 Asheville Citizen-Times. All rights reserved.