

WHO, WHAT, WHERE AND Y

A beginner's guide to working out at the Y BY AMY SCHNEIDER

When a fellow *EW* staffer and I decided to take advantage of our YMCA memberships last December, we experienced the smug satisfaction of being ahead of the New Year's resolution crowd; however, neither of us were particularly familiar with gym etiquette or protocol, and on our first day we hopped onto a few elliptical machines, pressing buttons and uncertainly moving the pedals as the panel instructed us.

Months later, we still weren't sure what all the settings actually did, and the other machines intimidated us with their complex, unfamiliar looks. Clinging to my elliptical, I kept a curious eye on a bouncy-looking machine in the corner of the gym but never felt brave enough to try it. We also made some rookie mistakes, like doing free weights in the no-free-weight zone (which we would have realized if we read the sign on the wall posted right in front of our faces).

Don't do what we did. The Y offers orientation classes, one-on-one opportunities and personalized programs, all included in YMCA membership. If you can't bring yourself to do that, then at least take some pointers from Kari Porter, the Y's health and wellness director, and Kimberly Miller, health and wellness coordinator for the Y.

"The orientation is the real tip of the iceberg, but I understand there's that mentality of, 'I got this. I don't really need to be shown anything, and I can figure this out.' That's a very human tendency," Porter says.

But blazing into the Y in complete ignorance of the rules and guidelines is not the best way to establish yourself as a respectable gym member. The first thing to know about the Y is how to use the machines, which is part etiquette, part know-how. Miller says that when machines are filled up, use the sign-in whiteboard to write down your name and the time. If the gym is busy, keep your workout limited to 30 minutes, and always check the name board before taking a machine, just in case others are waiting their turn.

Your choice of cardio machine depends on what your particular needs are. Porter recommends scheduling a private appointment with a wellness coach to figure that out. Partly, though, the machines are there for variety. For a low-impact, indoor run, the treadmill is best, but the elliptical is a good no-impact option because your feet never lose contact with the machine, cushioning your joints. The different settings allow for more variety



THE LATEST TRENDS IN WORKOUT EQUIPMENT ARE AN UPTICK IN ELLIPTICALS AND AMTS AND A DECLINE IN STAIRMASTERS

and provide a challenge that otherwise might not be present with a simple quick start.

For the experience of "running through the clouds," Miller says, try the adaptive motion trainer, or AMT, which turned out to be my mysterious bouncy machine, also no-impact. "This machine has an awesome range of motion," Porter says. One important tip: Start the AMT by moving your feet up and down in the footholds, then start moving front to back.

When you're done working out, don't forget to wipe off your machine. And don't spray the machine directly; instead, spray down a towel and use that to clean it.

"We ask people to wipe down not only where you were in contact with the machine, but also where there's sweat," Miller says. "And I usually tell people during cold and flu season to feel free and wipe it down before you get on because I can't guarantee the person before you did their due diligence with that."

Some more basic courtesy tips: Don't talk loudly on your cell phone (or take selfies; you don't have to document every second of your life), don't use the free weights in the stretching area, and if your shoes are muddy, take the time to clean up your mess. Be on the lookout for signs, because most machines are printed with diagrams and pictures to illustrate their proper use.

If in doubt, ask someone for help. There's usually a staff member or fellow gym member around who knows what's going on. "Sometimes people spark up friendships that way, by asking each other for help," Miller says. "It's a great community back here."

While I am still too stubborn to schedule an orientation, at least now I know how to be a good gym member. And I finally know how to use that bouncy-looking machine in the corner. ■



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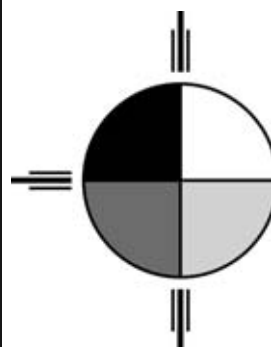
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