

How to choose a gym

What the contract actually costs across the minimum term, casual visits, and how to judge a personal trainer

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Gym pricing is deliberately presented as a weekly figure, because the weekly figure is the smallest number that can be attached to a twelve-month commitment. The question that matters is what the contract costs you in total, and what it costs to leave.

What it should cost

Take the weekly or fortnightly rate and multiply it by the minimum term. That is the real price. Compare that figure across gyms rather than the rate, because a lower weekly rate on a longer term frequently costs more.

Casual visits are usually available and are the cheapest way to find out whether you will actually go. Ask whether casual entry includes classes or is gym-floor only, because the difference is substantial.

Ask what the joining fee is, whether there is an annual maintenance fee, and what happens if you want to freeze the membership for injury or travel. Those three items are where the advertised price stops being the real price.

What the law requires

Fitness contracts are subject to the Australian Consumer Law and, in some cases, to industry codes covering minimum terms, cooling-off periods and cancellation. A contract term that is unfair - such as an excessive cancellation fee with no service delivered - can be challenged.

Ask for the cooling-off period in writing. It is not automatically generous on every membership type, and it always runs from signing rather than from when you start using the gym.

Direct debit arrangements have their own rules about varying the amount and cancelling. You should be able to cancel the debit authority independently of the gym, and a gym that claims you cannot is wrong.

Red flags

A price only ever given as a weekly figure.

Reluctance to state the minimum term or the cancellation notice period.

Claims that you cannot cancel the direct debit yourself.

Pressure to sign on the day to get a discount.

A gym that is effectively unstaffed at the hours you would use it.

What good looks like

The total cost across the term is stated without being asked twice.

The cooling-off period and cancellation process are in the written agreement.

Casual visits are genuinely available.

Staffing hours are published and accurate.

They ask what you are training for before selling you anything.

What to ask

- "What is the total cost across the minimum term?"
- "What is the joining fee, and is there an annual fee?"
- "What is the cooling-off period, in writing?"
- "What is the notice period to cancel, and how do I cancel the direct debit?"
- "Can I freeze the membership, and what does that cost?"
- "Does casual entry include classes?"
- "What are the staffed hours, and is it staffed when I would train?"

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