

Gym Safety Tips

(Ron Jones, MS, ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor, Corporate Wellcoach)



Belts: Forget them—belts don't prevent back injuries. Good form, body position, and sensible lifting prevent back injuries. Belts only weaken muscles by artificially supporting them. Instead of working the muscles and having them get stronger, the belt will take the work away from muscles making them weaker.

Breathing: Don't hold your breath when you lift because it can cause interabdominal pressure that can lead to a hernia—OUCH! Breathe out as you exert yourself and breathe in as you relax and let the weight back down.

Clothing: Keep your muscles covered and warm especially when it's cool. Clothing should be loose and comfortable but not so baggy that it gets in your way. ALWAYS wear supportive shoes that are *laced tight*—and no sandals.

Free Weights: Can be better for you because you use more postural muscles—but only if you already have the proper training. If using heavier free weights, it's a good idea to work with a trainer or "spotter" in case you need help completing your last rep. Make sure to use legs when racking weights because just lifting the plates or bars can hurt your back if you are out of position.

Lifting Position: Make sure you're positioned right for each specific exercise. Center your body under the bar or weights when possible. If you're lifting weight plates, make sure you're using your legs and directly facing the weights before you grab them.

Quantity of Reps: Basically about 8-12 but 12-15 is better for beginners. Whatever the "last rep" is, it should be the last one you can do "safely" WITHOUT breaking form and endangering your health. Your trainer should provide specific guidelines for repetitions and sets.

Speed: Lift slowly with control—you'll get stronger that way. Speed lifting with explosiveness is an advanced technique and not for beginners.

Spotters: A good idea if you are using free weights because if you burn out and don't have a partner—you can really strain your body or even suffer a serious injury.

Stance: Basic rule is shoulder width stance or more—this gives you a wider base of support and makes it harder to lose your balance and fall. Don't ever "lock" your knees; keep legs straight but not locked out.

* Ron Jones (9.4.07)