

DON'T SWEAT IT

The steps to overcoming gym anxiety

Story By Shalina Sabih, The Battalion L&A Writer

It's the Anxiety does not just refer to fear, dread and uneasiness towards speaking to large crowds or being scared of a prick from a sharp needle. For political science senior Hollee Trevino, anxiety was a relentless force, akin to a grim reaper that extended its long, cold, black cloak and suffocated her ambitions which kept her away from the gym.

"I've had anxiety since I was a kid but gym anxiety was always different because it physically did not allow me to do what I liked, which was working out," Trevino said.

The gym can be a battleground for many, with anxiety manifesting in various forms. Studies show at least 30% of people experience performance-based anxiety at the gym, while 42% admit they experience appearance-based anxiety when working out. Construction science junior Nana Dolley said she was always worried that people were scrutinizing her form and judging her.

"I've had anxiety all my life but gym anxiety was different because it made me so self-conscious," Dolley said. "It's weird 'cause I grew up playing sports and exercising but it was my decision to work out at the gym and I was scared."

Despite the overwhelming anxiety, Dolley was determined not to let it derail her fitness journey. She pushed through, finding that with each visit, her form improved and her fears gradually subsided. The repetition and familiarity of working out began to dissolve her anxiety, bit by bit.

Similarly, Trevino said her anxiety diminished over time, but not without effort. She forced herself, and a friend, to go to the gym every single day. The presence of a supportive companion made all the difference; for her it provided a safety net when her anxiety threatened to take over.

"I started off going by myself and that was my biggest mistake at first because it heightened my anxiety," Trevino said. "Start off small with exercises, don't start off with a huge routine and slowly add on when you get more comfortable and start with a friend."

Today, both Trevino and Dolley are regulars at the gym. The two said they were glad to have found ways to work around their anxiety.

Gym anxiety is largely a mental battle. The reality is that most people at the gym share the same goal: to improve themselves and become healthier. However, the paranoia — the fear of being watched, judged or failing — can keep people stuck at the threshold, with one foot in and one foot out.

"Everyone is going there to try and better themselves," communication senior Jared Shult said. "Myself and many other gym goers are happy to help anyone out who is new."

One of the most common sources of anxiety is the fear of the unknown — stepping into a gym without knowing where the machines are located or how to use them. Shult said it can be helpful to do research before working out and to have a plan of exercises you would like to do at the gym. Having those plans can significantly ease those first time jitters.

"Part of the anxiety is figuring out what to do but there are lots of resources on YouTube," Shult said. "In today's day and age, you could always ask ChatGPT for help."

Conquering gym anxiety is about more than just pushing through; it's about being prepared, finding support and reminding yourself that everyone else is on a similar journey. With time, patience and the right mindset, the gym can transform from a place of fear into a sanctuary of strength.

GYM ANXIETY TIPS



Start small

Begin with base exercises and gradually increase your routine



Bring a friend

Having a workout buddy can provide comfort and motivation



Prepare a plan

Research exercises and plan your workout ahead of time



Focus on yourself

Remember that most people are focused on their own workouts, not on you



Stay consistent

Regular visits can help reduce anxiety over time as you become more familiar



Seek support

Don't hesitate to ask gym staff or other gym-goers for help if needed



Set realistic goals

Start with achievable goals to build confidence gradually



Celebrate progress

Acknowledge small victories