FREE GUIDE FROM @AMALIA.MUNN.FITNESS

DAY ONE GYM GUIDE

Everything I wish someone had told me before I walked into a gym: what to bring, what the machines are for, what to say, and exactly what to do for your first four weeks.

For total beginners | 4 weeks | 2–3 workouts a week | About 45 minutes each

START HERE

Hi, I'm Amalia. In 2023 I spent a month in the hospital and lost basically all of my muscle. I'd grown up playing sports, but walking back into a gym in that body felt like being a total beginner. I had to start from zero.

Since then I've run marathons, become a certified yoga instructor, and I'm finishing my personal trainer certification. None of that happened because I was confident. The confidence came after I kept showing up.

This guide is the starting point I wish I'd had. You don't need to be fit to start, you don't need to know anything, and you don't need to look a certain way. You just need a plan you can follow, and that's what this is.

See you on the gym floor. Amalia

BEFORE YOU GO

Pack light, plan ahead

Bring

- A water bottle
- Shoes with a flat, stable sole. Your everyday trainers are fine to start.
- Clothes you can move in and then forget about
- Headphones and a playlist you love
- Your phone with today's workout saved in your notes
- A small towel, and a lock if your gym has lockers

Make it easier on yourself

- Go at a quiet time. Mid-morning, early afternoon and after 8pm are usually calmest. Ask the front desk when it's least busy.
- Ask for a free tour when you sign up. Most gyms offer one, and the staff are paid to help you.
- Eat a normal meal or snack a couple of hours before.
- Decide what you're doing before you walk in. Wandering is what makes people feel lost.

READ THE GYM

What every area is for

Almost every gym is split into the same five zones. You'll use three of them this month. The rest can wait until you feel ready.

USE THIS MONTH

Machines

Each one does one exercise. You move a pin to choose the weight, and adjust the seat so the pivot lines up with your joint. There's a diagram sticker on every machine showing how to use it.

USE THIS MONTH

Dumbbells and benches

The rack of hand weights, sorted light to heavy. Grab a pair, then step back from the rack or take them to a bench so people can reach theirs.

USE THIS MONTH

Cardio floor

Treadmills, bikes, rowers and stair climbers. Perfect for your warm-up, and a safe place to stand while you look around.

LATER

Cable station

A tall frame with pulleys and handles that clip on. You'll use it for rows once you're comfortable. Ask staff to show you how the clips work.

LATER

Racks and barbells

The squat racks and long bars. Totally learnable, and not where you need to start. Dumbbells teach the same moves.

USE THIS MONTH

Stretch area or turf

Mats, open floor space and foam rollers. Your home base for warm-ups, core work and your cool-down.

YOUR FIRST VISIT

Visit Zero: 30 minutes, no pressure

Your first visit isn't a workout. It's a scouting trip. The only goal is to walk in, learn where things are, and leave feeling like you can come back.

Minutes 0–5: Walk the floor

Find the water fountain, the bathrooms, the dumbbell rack and the stretch area. That's your map.

Minutes 5–15: Easy cardio

Bike or walk on the treadmill at a pace where you could chat. Use this time to watch how people move around the space.

Minutes 15–25: Try three machines

Leg press, lat pulldown and seated row. Read the sticker, set a light weight, do 10 easy reps on each. You're learning the seat settings, not working hard.

Minutes 25–30: Stretch and leave

A few minutes on the mats, then go home. You did the hardest part.

THE MOVES

8 moves that cover your whole body

Every strength program is built from a handful of movement patterns: squat, hinge, push, pull, lunge, carry and brace. Learn these eight and you can walk into any gym and know what to do.

SQUAT

Goblet squat

- Hold one dumbbell upright against your chest, elbows tucked.
- Feet a little wider than hips, toes slightly out.
- Sit down between your heels, knees tracking over your toes, then stand up tall.

Easier: squat down to a bench and stand back up.
Harder: pause for 2 seconds at the bottom.

HINGE

Dumbbell Romanian deadlift

- Stand tall with a dumbbell in each hand in front of your thighs.
- Soft knees. Push your hips back like you're closing a car door with your butt.
- Lower until you feel a stretch in your hamstrings, then squeeze your glutes to stand.

Tip: keep the weights brushing your legs. If your back rounds, you've gone too low.

PUSH

Incline push-up

- Hands on a bench or the edge of a box, a bit wider than shoulders.
- Body in one straight line from head to heels.
- Lower your chest to the bench, elbows angled back at about 45°, and press away.

Easier: use a higher surface, like a wall or a racked bar. **Harder:** lower surface, or a dumbbell bench press.

PULL

Lat pulldown

- Adjust the thigh pad so your legs are locked in.
- Grip the bar a little wider than shoulders and lean back slightly.
- Pull the bar to your upper chest by driving your elbows down toward your back pockets.

Tip: control the bar on the way up. If you have to swing, the weight is too heavy.

SQUAT

Leg press

- Back and hips flat against the pad, feet hip-width in the middle of the platform.
- Release the safety handles and bend your knees toward your chest.
- Press through your whole foot. Stop just short of locking your knees.

Tip: only go as deep as you can without your lower back peeling off the pad.

LUNGE

Split squat

- Take a long step forward and stay there, back heel lifted.
- Lower straight down until your back knee hovers above the floor.
- Push through your front foot to come up. Do all reps on one side, then switch.

Easier: hold a bench or wall for balance. **Harder:** hold a dumbbell in each hand.

PULL

Seated row

- Sit tall on the row machine (or cable row) with your chest against the pad if there is one.
- Pull the handles toward your ribs, squeezing your shoulder blades together.
- Let your arms straighten slowly without slumping forward.

Swap: a one-arm dumbbell row with your hand and knee on a bench works too.

CARRY AND BRACE

Farmer carry and dead bug

- **Carry:** hold a heavy-ish dumbbell in each hand, stand tall, and walk slowly for 30 seconds. Shoulders down, no leaning.
- **Dead bug:** lie on your back, arms up, knees over hips. Press your low back into the floor and slowly lower opposite arm and leg, then switch.

Why: these build the core strength that makes every other lift feel steadier.

THE PROGRAM

Your 4-week plan

Two full-body workouts, A and B. Alternate them: A, B, A one week, then B, A, B the next. Rest 60–90 seconds between sets. Start every session with the 5-minute warm-up and finish with the cool-down.

A

Squat · Hinge · Push · Pull

Goblet squat	**3 × 10**
Dumbbell Romanian deadlift	**3 × 10**
Incline push-up	**3 × 8**
Lat pulldown	**3 × 10**
Dead bug	**2 × 8 / side**

3 × 10 means 3 sets of 10 reps.

B

Legs · Pull · Carry

Leg press	**3 × 12**
Split squat	**2 × 8 / side**
Seated row	**3 × 10**
Dumbbell shoulder press (seated)	**2 × 10**
Farmer carry	**3 × 30 sec**

Only have 2 days a week? Do A and B. That's still a real program.

5-minute warm-up

- 3 minutes easy bike, walk or row
- 10 bodyweight squats
- 5 cat-cows and 5 downward dog to plank waves
- 10 arm circles each way
- 1 light practice set of your first exercise

5-minute cool-down

- Child's pose, 5 slow breaths
- Low lunge hip stretch, 30 seconds each side
- Figure-four glute stretch, 30 seconds each side
- Thread the needle for your upper back
- Lie on your back and breathe for one minute. You earned it.

WEEK	FOCUS	WHAT TO DO
Week 1	Learn	Do 2 sets of each exercise instead of 3. Pick weights that feel almost too easy. You're learning the movements and the room.
Week 2	Settle in	Move to the full sets. Write down the weight you used for each exercise.
Week 3	Progress	Start using the 2-reps-left rule below to add weight where you're ready.
Week 4	Own it	Same plan, a little heavier. Notice how different the gym feels from week 1.

PICKING A WEIGHT

The 2-reps-left rule

2–3 Finish every set feeling like you could have done **2 or 3 more reps with good form**. If you could have done 6 more, go up. If your form broke down before the last rep, go down. No one gets this right the first time, and that's normal.

When to go heavier

When you can do every set at the top of the rep range and still have 2 left in the tank, move up to the next weight next time. Small jumps are perfect.

Effort vs. pain

Burning muscles and heavy breathing are effort. Sharp, pinching or joint pain is a stop sign. Stop that exercise, and check in with a professional if it doesn't go away.

TRACKER

12 workouts, one month

Tick each one off after you finish. Missed a day? Pick up where you left off. The plan waits for you.

WEEK 1

- [ ] **A**
- [ ] **B**
- [ ] **A**

WEEK 2

- [ ] **B**
- [ ] **A**
- [ ] **B**

WEEK 3

- [ ] **A**
- [ ] **B**
- [ ] **A**

WEEK 4

- [ ] **B**
- [ ] **A**
- [ ] **B**

0 of 12 done

CONFIDENCE

Exactly what to say

Most gym anxiety is about the social stuff, not the lifting. These lines cover almost every situation you'll run into.

A machine looks free but has a towel or water bottle on it	**"Hey, are you using this?"**
Someone's on the machine you need	**"How many sets do you have left?"**
You'd like to share between their sets	**"Mind if I work in with you?"**
You can't figure out a machine (ask staff, that's their job)	**"Could you show me how to adjust this?"**
Someone gives you advice you didn't ask for	**"Thanks, I'm good!"**

Things that help

- Claim a home base, like a bench in a corner, and bring your dumbbells there.
- Keep headphones in, even with nothing playing.
- Bring a friend for your first few visits.
- Film a set on your phone to check your form. Just keep other people out of the frame.

Remember this

Everyone in the gym is thinking about their own workout, their own form and their own playlist. The regulars all had a first day too, and most of them are happy to see someone new show up.

UNWRITTEN RULES

Gym etiquette

Do

- Put weights back where you found them.
- Wipe down benches and machines after you use them.
- Step back from the dumbbell rack before you lift.
- Let people work in between your sets if they ask.

Don't

- Sit on a machine scrolling your phone between sets when it's busy.
- Walk right in front of someone mid-lift. Wait a few seconds.
- Film or photograph other people.
- Apologize for being there. You belong there as much as anyone.

FOOD AND RECOVERY

Fuel it, don't count it

You don't need to track anything to get stronger this month. You need to eat enough, sleep, and give your body time to rebuild.

Eat to train

- Have a meal or snack a couple of hours before you train. Training on empty makes everything harder.
- Include a protein food at each meal: eggs, Greek yogurt, tofu, beans, chicken, fish, cottage cheese.
- Carbs are your friend. They're the fuel for your workouts.
- Drink water through the day, not just at the gym.

Recover to grow

- Muscle is built between workouts. Rest days are part of the plan.
- Sleep is the most underrated thing you can do for your progress.
- Soreness a day or two after a workout is normal, especially in week 1. A walk or gentle yoga flow helps.
- Feeling run down? Do a lighter session or take the day. Consistency over weeks matters more than any single workout.

WHAT'S NEXT

Finished your 12 workouts?

On January 5, 2027 I'm starting Ground Zero: a 12-week beginner strength program I'll be doing publicly, from the very first workout. If this guide got you through the door, Ground Zero will take you the rest of the way. Follow along on Instagram so you don't miss week one, and send me a DM when you finish this month. I want to hear about it.

Follow @amalia.munn.fitness

This guide is general information for healthy adults, not medical advice. If you have an injury, a health condition, are pregnant, or haven't exercised in a long time, check with your doctor before starting a new program. Amalia is a certified yoga instructor and personal trainer in training.