Lauchlan Dougall
Personal Training

FREE GUIDE

The Gym Starter Pack

A clearer place to start when the gym feels unfamiliar.

For beginners and returners who want to build confidence, consistency and a realistic routine.

WELCOME

You do not need to feel confident before you start.

Most people assume confidence comes first. In reality, it usually comes after showing up a few times, learning where things are and realising you do not need to know everything straight away.

This guide is here to make those first few sessions feel a little more straightforward.

You do not need to be the fittest person in the gym. You do not need to know how every machine works. You just need a place to begin.

Confidence is built by showing up, not before you start.

BEFORE YOU START

Starting small is completely fine

What to bring

- A water bottle
- A small towel
- Headphones, if music helps you settle
- Your plan, saved on your phone
- A padlock if you want to use a locker

What to wear

Anything you can move comfortably in and a pair of supportive trainers. You do not need new kit or anything fancy.

You do not need to know everything before your first visit. Most of what feels unfamiliar now becomes normal after a few sessions.

Choosing a realistic first goal

Pick something you can control, such as “go to the gym twice this week” or “try three machines”. Small, specific goals are easier to repeat, and repeating them is what builds confidence.

BEFORE YOUR FIRST VISIT

Make the first visit easier

- Decide what you are going to do before arriving.
- Wear clothes you feel comfortable moving in.
- Bring water and headphones if they help you feel settled.
- Visit at a quieter time if that makes things easier.
- Save your plan on your phone.
- Start with equipment you recognise.
- Give yourself permission to take your time.
- Ask for help if you are unsure how to set something up.

You are allowed to look around, take a breath and work things out. Nobody starts out knowing everything.

YOUR FIRST VISIT

What to expect when you walk in

Most gyms have a cardio area, a machines area, a free-weights area with dumbbells and benches, and usually a quieter stretching space. It can feel busy and a bit loud at first, and that is normal.

- Take a slow walk round first so you know where things are.
- If it feels busy, start in a quieter area such as the stretching space or a corner of the machines.
- Take your time. There is no rush to get onto equipment.
- Staff and coaches are there to help. Asking how to set up a machine is completely normal.

Everyone in that gym had a first session too. Most people are far too focused on their own workout to notice yours.

UNDERSTANDING THE EQUIPMENT

A simple guide to what you will see

Treadmill

A walking or running belt. Start at a gentle walk and increase the speed slowly.

Cross trainer

A low-impact cardio machine that moves your arms and legs together. Easy on the joints.

Exercise bike

A seated bike for gentle, steady cardio. Adjust the seat so your knee is slightly bent at the bottom.

Cable machines

A tall frame with an adjustable pulley and handles. Very versatile, and easy to use with light weights.

Chest press

A seated machine where you push handles away from your chest. Works the chest, shoulders and backs of the arms.

Seated row

A seated machine where you pull handles towards you. Works the upper back and arms.

Leg press

A seated machine where you push a platform away with your feet. Works the legs and glutes.

Lat pulldown

A seated machine where you pull a bar down towards your chest. Works the back and arms.

Dumbbells

Hand weights in a rack, usually in pairs from light to heavy. Start lighter than you think you need.

YOUR FIRST THREE SESSIONS

A simple way to get started

The aim of your first few sessions is not to exhaust yourself. It is to become familiar with the gym, practise the basics and build a routine you can repeat.

Session 1: Get familiar

- 5–10 minutes of easy cardio
- Leg press or goblet squat
- Seated chest press or light dumbbell press
- Seated row
- Seated leg curl
- Short, comfortable cool-down

Session 2: Repeat and build confidence

- Use some of the same exercises.
- Focus on setting up each machine properly.
- Use a weight that allows controlled repetitions.
- Leave a few repetitions in reserve.
- Write down what you completed.

Session 3: Start building consistency

- Repeat exercises that felt comfortable.
- Make one small improvement.
- Add a repetition or a small amount of weight only if it feels appropriate.
- Keep the session manageable.
- Finish feeling like you could come back again.

The goal is to leave knowing you can come back.

This is general guidance rather than an individual training programme. Choose suitable exercises for your own ability, stop if you experience sharp pain, dizziness or anything that feels wrong, and seek individual advice where needed.

A SIMPLE FULL-BODY SESSION

A full-body starter session

Pick a weight you could lift a few more times at the end of each set. It should feel steady and controlled, not a struggle. Rest for about a minute between sets.

1. Leg press — legs and glutes

- 2 sets of 10–12
- Tip: keep your feet flat and lower under control.
- Alternative: bodyweight squat to a bench

2. Seated row — upper back and arms

- 2 sets of 10–12
- Tip: sit tall and squeeze your shoulder blades together.
- Alternative: cable row

3. Chest press — chest, shoulders and arms

- 2 sets of 10–12
- Tip: push smoothly and do not lock your elbows hard.
- Alternative: incline push-up against a bench

4. Lat pulldown — back and arms

- 2 sets of 10–12
- Tip: pull the bar towards your upper chest, not behind your head.
- Alternative: cable pulldown with a light weight

5. Dumbbell Romanian deadlift — hamstrings, glutes and lower back

- 2 sets of 8–10
- Tip: push your hips back with a soft bend in the knees and keep the dumbbells close to your legs.
- Alternative: glute bridge on a mat

6. Cardio finish

- 5–10 minutes on the treadmill, bike or cross trainer at a pace where you could still hold a conversation.

This is general guidance, not a medical prescription or an individual programme. Choose what suits your own ability and seek individual advice if you have an injury or health condition.

MACHINE CONFIDENCE

You are allowed to use the machines

1. Adjust the seat or pad so you feel comfortable.
2. Start with a very light test set.
3. Check that the movement feels controlled.
4. Keep the repetitions steady rather than rushing.
5. Avoid forcing a range of movement that does not feel comfortable.
6. Return weights carefully when you finish.
7. Wipe the equipment down where required.

Machines are not a shortcut or something to be embarrassed about. They can be a useful way to learn how an exercise feels and build confidence before trying other options.

WARM-UP AND COOL-DOWN

Keep the warm-up and cool-down simple

A short warm-up gently raises your heart rate and helps your joints and muscles feel ready to move. Five to ten minutes is plenty.

Easy warm-up options

- 5 minutes of easy walking, cycling or cross trainer
- A light first set of your first exercise
- Arm circles, leg swings and gentle bodyweight squats

The cool-down does not need to be complicated. A few minutes of easy walking and some gentle stretches for the areas you trained is enough.

Stop and ask for help if you feel sharp pain, chest pain, dizziness, unusual breathlessness or anything that does not feel right.

WHEN THE GYM IS BUSY

What to do when your planned equipment is taken

- Use a similar machine.
- Swap a machine exercise for a dumbbell or bodyweight version.
- Move to a quieter part of the gym.
- Complete another exercise while you wait.
- Ask how many sets someone has left.
- Come back to the exercise later.
- Keep the session flexible rather than abandoning it completely.

A busy gym does not mean the session is ruined. It usually just means the plan needs a small adjustment.

BUILDING CONSISTENCY

How to build consistency

- Start with two or three sessions a week.
- Keep sessions manageable — 30 to 45 minutes is plenty.
- Track how often you turn up rather than chasing perfect sessions.
- Progress gradually: one extra repetition or a small weight increase at a time.
- Take rest days. Recovery is where progress happens.
- Missed a session? Simply do the next one. There is no need to make up for it.
- Focus on confidence and routine first. Intensity can come later.

FOOD, RECOVERY AND PROGRESS

Keep the basics simple

- Drink enough water across the day.
- Include a source of protein in regular meals.
- Eat in a way that supports both training and normal life.
- Give yourself time to recover.
- Remember that sleep and rest are part of progress.
- You do not need to remove every food you enjoy.
- You do not need supplements to get started.
- Track sessions completed, confidence, energy and consistency, not just body weight.

Progress can mean becoming more comfortable with a machine, completing a session you nearly skipped, using better technique or returning the following week.

COMMON GYM WORRIES

Common gym worries, answered

“I don’t know what I’m doing.”

That is completely normal at the start. Follow a simple plan like the one in this guide and you will learn as you go.

“Everyone will be watching me.”

Most people are focused on their own session, their music or their phone. Hardly anyone is paying attention to anyone else.

“I’m not fit enough.”

You do not need to get fit before you go to the gym. That is what the gym is for. Start where you are.

“I don’t know which weights to use.”

Start light. If you could easily do many more repetitions, go up a little next set. If your form breaks down, go lighter.

“I’m worried about using the machines.”

Most machines have a picture guide on the side. Adjust the seat, try a very light set first and ask staff if you are unsure.

“I’ve been away from the gym for a long time.”

Welcome back. Start lighter and shorter than you used to, and build back up gradually. Your body often remembers more than you expect.

COMMON MISTAKES

You do not need to get everything right

- Trying to do too much in the first session
- Changing the whole plan every week
- Comparing your first session with someone else’s tenth year
- Thinking soreness is the only sign of a good workout
- Avoiding exercises because you are worried about looking inexperienced
- Giving up after missing one session
- Waiting until you feel confident before starting

Consistency does not mean being perfect. It means finding a way to keep coming back.

WHEN COACHING COULD HELP

You do not have to figure everything out alone

Some people only need a clear starting point. Others feel better with someone helping them build a plan, learn technique and stay accountable.

Coaching may be useful if:

- You are unsure what to do when you arrive.
- You keep starting and stopping.
- You want feedback on your technique.
- You would feel more confident with someone alongside you.
- You are working towards a specific event or performance goal.
- You train with another person and want shared accountability.
- Your week is busy and you need more structure.
- You want a plan that fits around work, running or everyday life.
- You want guidance with strength training.

I coach at PureGym Rutherglen and online, with options from a six-week starting point to ongoing 1:1 and 2:1 support. There is no pressure — use whatever feels useful.

NEXT STEPS

Your next step

You do not need to feel completely confident before you begin. Confidence usually comes from taking the first few manageable steps.

Take the short coaching quiz to find the option that best matches your goals and preferred level of support.

Take the 60-second quiz: lauchlandougallpt.co.uk/find-your-package

Or book a free consultation if you would rather talk things through.

Book a free consultation: calendly.com/lauchlandougallpt/consultation

See the coaching options:

lauchlandougallpt.co.uk/packages

See you in the gym!
Lauchlan

Lauchlan Dougall Personal Training
PureGym Rutherglen · Online coaching
lauchlandougallpt.co.uk · Instagram @LauchlanDougallPT