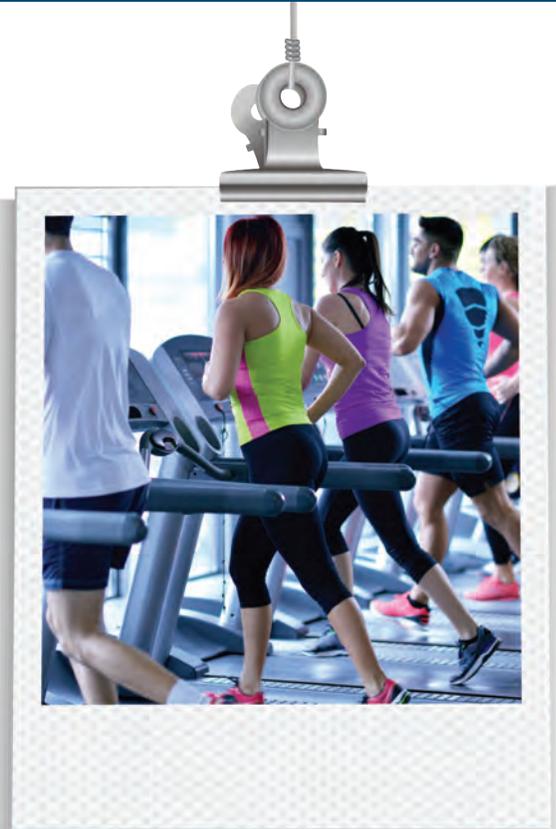




THINKING OF JOINING A GYM?

After the indulgences of the holidays have passed, many of us look for ways to shed those extra pounds. Working out at a gym, or health studio as referred to in Florida law, has become one of the most common means of getting in shape. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is responsible for regulating health studios within the state.

- Do your research when deciding which gym to join. Find out if the gym is registered with the department, and if any complaints have been filed. This can be done by searching the “Business/Complaint Lookup” at 800helpfla.com or by calling 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352). If there are complaints on file, find out how they were resolved.
- Avoid a long term commitment until you use the gym and feel comfortable it will meet your needs. Some gyms may be reluctant to disclose monthly memberships fees. They may require a commitment for one year, but with no large up-front payment. Shop around and ask questions to ensure you know what the membership includes.
- If the gym charges an up-front fee, it must be considered a “reasonable and fair service fee,” meaning no more than 10% of the total contract price. Service fees include, but are not limited to, registration fee, membership fee, and processing or startup fees.
- The safest way to pay for a gym membership is with a credit card or by check each month. Setting up payment via electronic withdrawal from your checking account may lead to billing problems in the event of a billing dispute.
- Some gyms ask you to sign a contract and pay the first time you visit and offer incentives like special rates to entice you to sign immediately. It’s a good idea to wait a few days before joining. Take the contract home and read it carefully. If you don’t understand something, ask for clarification before signing.
- Note that the contract must include a provision for a penalty-free cancellation in writing within three days, exclusive of holidays and weekends, of signing a contract.



For additional information, to verify a health studio’s registration status, or to file a complaint, contact the department at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352), 1-800-FL-AYUDA (352-9832) en Español, or visit 800helpfla.com.



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Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Adam H. Putnam, Commissioner