

LECTURE 1

Health & Safety

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Health & Safety in the Fitness Environment

The content of this lecture is centred around the aspects of health and safety you will need to be aware of in the fitness environment, particularly the following areas:

- Health and safety requirements.
- Controlling the risks most common in a fitness environment.
- Emergency procedures you need to be aware of.
- Safeguarding measures to protect children and vulnerable adults.

The fitness environment is an area that has many inherent risks and as such, health and safety is an important thing to be aware of in the fitness industry. Instructors must stay up to date with their legal responsibilities and those of the health club in order to perform the role.

The first piece of legislation you need to know about is the...

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974



This is the foundational form of health and safety legislation and applies to all sectors. It sets out general duties which:

- **employers** have towards employees and members of the public,
- **employers** have to themselves and to each other,
- certain **self-employed** people have towards themselves and others.

Other policies you should be aware of...

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999) places a responsibility on employers to assess and manage risks to employees and others resulting from work activities.

The main requirement on employers is to carry out a risk assessment. Employers with five or more employees need to record the significant findings of the risk assessment.

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH)

In the fitness environment you will likely be required to work with a range of chemicals, from cleaning products through to plant-room pool chemicals. COSHH regulations are designed to keep you safe when you do so.

Prior to a COSHH assessment you should consider...

- What do you do that involves hazardous substances?
- How can these cause harm?
- How can you reduce the risk of harm occurring?

Once assessed, there can be an operating procedure devised and training offered to all who will be required to handle the chemicals.

Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations

RIDDOR requires employers, and those in charge of work premises, to report and keep records of:

- Work-related accidents which cause deaths
- Work-related accidents which cause serious injuries
- Diagnosed cases of certain industrial diseases
- 'Dangerous occurrences' (incidents with the potential to cause harm)

The Employer's Responsibilities

Here is an overview of the responsibilities employers hold...

Policies – prepare and revise a written statement of the policy with regard to health & safety at work for both employees and the organisation.

Reporting – to put in place a reporting system for all accidents, injuries, near misses or other dangerous occurrences.
Substance control – appropriate arrangements for the handling, transport, safe use and storage of substances that could damage health. This needs to be COSHH- compliant.

Equipment – provide appropriate equipment and training for that equipment.

First aid – provide all the required first-aid equipment as well as training on the use of it. Also the ongoing replenishment of the first-aid kits.

Risk assessments & precautions – devise risk assessments for any and all situations that could result in injury and making sure that all reasonable precautions are taken.

Visitors – ensure that visitors are logged, not only to ensure members and people on the premises are not exposed to unnecessary risk, but also to comply with fire regulations.

Maintenance – ensure that maintenance is routinely carried out ensuring the workplace remains safe.

What about the employee and self-employed persons?



- Co-operate fully with the employer to ensure health and safety legislation and law compliance.
- Discuss any potential issues with the employer regarding any situations that present a serious risk, in order to prevent future problems.
- To conduct themselves in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that they and other persons are not exposed to risks to their health or safety.
- Attend training where appropriate

What can we do to ensure health and safety in our health clubs?

Risk Assessment

The first step is to carry out a risk assessment. This is a process that can be reviewed and amended as necessary to ensure the facility remains safe for all visitors. Here are the five steps to risk assessment...

- **Identify the hazards** - there are many hazards in the fitness environment ranging from equipment to cleanliness, from trip hazards to other gym users. Identifying all potential hazards is the first step.
- **Determine who could be harmed and how** - this step relates to all visitors. It is important to remember the differences between people and their risk level. For example, you could look at the special populations groups here and consider the additional risks they face in the facility.
- **Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions** - you can evaluate the risks you find and prioritise the ones that are either most likely to happen, or could be the most damaging. You may control these by highlighting the risk to visitors so that it minimises the chances of an issue.
- **Record your findings** - this is important so that in the event of any issue occurring it is clear that you have taken precautions to minimise the risk.
- **Review and update your risk assessment**- the facility evolves and changes, as do the potential risks the visitors will face. It is important to review the risk assessment and make any amendments necessary to maintain a high level of awareness around this area.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) should be provided for all employees requiring it in a fitness environment. You may be working with chemicals in the pool-plant room, or cleaning substances in the gym area with products that may be harmful, and PPE is important for your protection.

These are the considerations...

- Is it suitable for the conditions of the job?
- Does it offer the right level of protection?
- What sort of training and maintenance is required?
- Will it need replacing? How do I know when it does?
- It must be maintained and stored correctly.
- It should fit the wearer correctly.

Manual Handling

Manual handling is another area in which an employer must risk-assess the potential for injury with employees and provide appropriate solutions and provisions.

Consideration should be given to...

- Person's capability.
- Load to be lifted.
- Training offered.
- Environmental conditions.

You should endeavour to...

- Use lifting equipment if possible.
- Avoid twisting.
- Lift with legs rather than reaching and twisting.
- Minimise carrying distance.
- Assess if the load can be broken down.

First Aid

A fitness facility should be well equipped with a well-stocked first aid box and a defibrillator. There should be adequate and appropriate training for the first aiders in the facility. It is important that you check what the rules are, relating to the facility you are working in. It may not be a requirement for all staff members to hold a first-aid qualification but it is very useful to do so.

Regardless of your level of training it is likely that you will be involved in the first-aid process at some level. It may be that you will have to liaise with emergency services if required, or assist the first aider, so be prepared for this in your role.

Noise Levels

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations (2005) require employers to prevent or reduce risks from exposure to noise at work. This should ensure that workers' hearing is protected from excessive noise in the workplace.

Health & Safety Manual

Employers must provide, and make available, a health and safety manual for all their staff, to include the company's full policy on health and safety. It must include...

- The company's health and safety statement.
- The company's organisation and structure.
- Health and safety rules relating to procedures, and accompanying guidance.
- Risk assessment procedures.
- Accident reporting and disease reporting.
- Date, time and place of the incident.
- Personal details of all involved.
- A brief description of the event.

Manufacturers Guidelines

You should have access to the guidelines of use for the equipment you have in the fitness facility. This will ensure you know as much as is reasonable to know about how to operate the equipment and its safe maintenance.

We discussed manual handling above, but let's look a little closer...

As a trainer, you will have lots of responsibilities around lifting and carrying. You may be collecting and returning weights for your clients or clearing the gym floor throughout your shift. You might even assist in moving larger equipment around the gym in the event of a refurbishment etc. While you may feel adequately prepared, and physically fit enough to perform these tasks there are certain guidelines you must follow to ensure your safety, and that of those around you.

Remember we have a duty of care to clients to ensure they are kept 'risk-free' as far as reasonably possible, so we must ensure they are also equipped to lift and carry effectively.

Access – emergency exits, disabled access and proper signage are all important and must be in place.

Portable equipment – always needs to be moved back to its storage location and adequately stored.

Hygiene – we need to make sure that the gym is a clean and safe place to be. Spray bottles with wipes must be made available for people to use.

Equipment condition - make sure equipment is kept in working order. There are risks associated with particular types of equipment.

Cardiovascular Kit

- Breakdown.
- Incorrect use.
- Worn parts.

Resistance Kit

- Incorrect Use.
- Trip Hazards.
- Not Using Collars.

Storage – secure storage for COSHH substances needs to be provided, as well as storage for moveable or excess equipment so that the gym floor is kept clear.

Client behaviour – the health facility should have a clearly defined and established code of conduct for members that they must be aware of. It also needs to be easily accessible.

Equipment faults – any faulty equipment should be marked as out of order immediately and the issue raised with the relevant supplier or maintenance technician.

Swimming pool – there are a number of risks associated with swimming pools including...

- Drowning risk.
- Unsafe behaviour.
- Weak swimmers.
- Poor signage (eg shallow end not clearly marked).
- Pool chemicals.
- Slip hazards.

So...what do I need to be aware of...?

What are the overall considerations you, as a fitness professional, need to think about in your role?

You should be aware of several key documents and policies relating to your job role, and the place where you work.

The main reasons for this is that you are then well prepared to work within the gym, and understand how best to maintain the health and safety of yourself and all others at the facility, which will help to ensure its smooth running..

The considerations you need to be aware of, and the policies, procedures and documents to understand include:

Emergency Action Plan

An EAP is designed to help the employer and employee with their roles and responsibilities during workplace emergencies.

Qualification

You must be appropriately qualified and trained for your job role. There are a wide range of qualifications in the fitness industry and it is important that as your role and responsibilities change, your education is adequate.

REPS or CIMSPA

These are the recognised organisations for fitness professionals. Your insurance may be provided by these bodies, and your continuing professional development (CPD) should be logged so that there is evidence of your qualifications to suit your job role.

Public Liability Insurance

There are many different levels of insurance cover available in fitness - the minimum cover you'll require is public liability insurance. Check with your employer as to the level of cover you need.

Emergency Operating Procedures

Emergency Operating Procedures (EOPs)

Health Screening

Prior to activity you will screen clients in order to assess their readiness to undertake an exercise programme. This will include an 'informed consent' form and a 'physical activity readiness questionnaire' (PAR-Q).

Normal Operating Procedures

The NOPs are related to everyday operations of the fitness facility such as security procedures, opening and closing.

As well as the above you need to understand the 'health commitment statement' (HCS)

The purpose of a health commitment statement is to highlight the standards that the facility, staff and other users will uphold in the safety of the visitors. It should be made available to the members and might be included as a part of their welcome pack so that they are fully aware of the organisation's responsibilities, as well as their own. It doesn't have to be a lengthy document but should include important information that has been included to make sure everyone can exercise safely. The key reasons for having an HCS are as follows...

- Give members more responsibility for their own health and safety.
- Maximise the facility's opportunity to offer activity to members.
- Work in line with current trends and changes in legislation.
- Work in line with guidelines from medical and fitness industries while ensuring activity is available to all.
- Remove stress and anxiety from staff in relation to the health of members.

We look now at the organisational structure and the roles you might need to be aware of...

Managers & Business Owners

- Have the overall responsibility for health and safety at the health club.

First Aid & CPR Qualified Staff

- First aid training may not be offered by the health club but is a very valuable skill for you to have as a fitness professional.

Defibrillator Trained Staff

- Clubs should offer adequate training to all staff who may need to use this equipment.

Health & Safety Officer

- Will hold the responsibility for all health and safety matters including risk assessments, policies and procedures.

Another thing to consider is duty of care

Duty of care relates to the obligation the fitness trainer has to the members for the provision of a level of care that can be reasonably expected to help avoid harm. This can be related to a member's safe usage of the facility, or in the member's exercise prescription.

Trainers will need to consider their duty of care on an individual basis when it comes to clients and members. There will be a standard obligation to provide safe exercises for the members but this will vary among people and demographics. For example, each of the special populations require different exercise prescriptions.

Be aware in this situation that you may acquire knowledge in the areas outlined but this still doesn't make you fully qualified to offer specialist advice. The take-home message is that you should seek other professionals if the needs are out of your remit as a trainer.

Screening a client is a very important part of the role of a fitness professional and one that should be completed fully and comprehensively in order to minimise any potential health-related issues from occurring. This is also your first opportunity to build rapport with your members and enhance their member journey with you.

Informed consent needs to be obtained first

Informed consent is a document signed by the member to acknowledge that they are aware of the process they are about to begin, as well as the potential risks involved in the process. They also acknowledge the process not only in terms of the exercise demands, but also as it relates to your involvement, data collection and processing, and confidentiality.

What is the purpose of the PAR-Q?

Exercise Prescription

The client may not be aware of the exercise prescription limitation issues they face with any issues they may have. This process will give you the opportunity to highlight any potential contra-indicators or any medical referral information.

Exercise Contra-Indicators

Once you've ascertained that the client is safe to train, there may well be exercises that need to be excluded based on the results of the PAR-Q.

Client Understanding

The screening process in general and the PAR-Q specifically allow you to outline any and all of the issues that a client may face in training, allowing you to assist them in creating a positive exercise habit safely.

Considerations

As an instructor you need to be aware of how and when to have the client complete their PAR-Q. Understand that you will be told some sensitive information and that this won't always be easy. For this reason, you should offer the client the chance to do this in a private area rather than on a busy gym floor where possible.

You must also stress that you need the client to be completely honest with you so that you can more reasonably ensure their safety in training.

Written

A written PAR-Q is important. It will ensure you have the information confirmed from the client in writing, that can support you in creating their exercise programme. It is easy to miscommunicate a verbal PAR-Q, although this has its place. Make sure you start with a written PAR-Q initially.

Verbal

A verbal PAR-Q should always be given prior to any session with a client. They may have suffered an injury or illness that will limit their participation since they completed their written PAR-Q.

If you offer a verbal PAR-Q at the outset of the session you will be able to plan effectively for the workout ahead.

Awareness

You may not have taken the initial screening with a client, or a lot may have changed since their initial PAR-Q, so you cannot be expected to know all the details. This is especially true if you start training a client after they've been a member or a long time. Check their paperwork prior to starting with them - or reissue the forms again.

Security

The final section in the lecture on health and safety is the topic of security. Health clubs need to ensure their members are well looked after when they are on the premises and there are several methods they may choose to employ to achieve this. There are indoor and outdoor security measures that health clubs may utilise.

Interior Security may include...

- Lockers for members' belongings.
- Access turnstiles.
- Registers for classes.
- Alarms for attention (mainly held by staff).
- Radios held by staff for use in communicating with co-workers.

Exterior Security may include...

- Security staff (may be interior or exterior).
- CCTV monitoring of public areas that can be used for recording.
- Adequately lit areas.
- Car park access control.
- Access code (this is used in many 24-hour gyms that are not always staffed).

We mentioned the use of access codes for gyms that are not always staffed, such as 24-hour gyms. It is important if you work in a gym such as this that you are fully aware of the health and safety procedures that relate to a gym that isn't staffed at all times. Medical emergencies are one such instance that are complicated in these environments as there won't be any staff to assist. Procedures need to be followed correctly that may help to identify the risks or prevent the occurrence...

