

A close-up photograph of a person's hands gripping a barbell. The person is wearing a black athletic top. The background is slightly blurred, showing a gym environment with a window and some equipment. The text is overlaid on the image in white.

Stronger Together: Reimagining Gym Membership for Health Challenges

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The Reality: A “healthy” Industry Snapshot

- UK: 11.5M gym members (16.9% penetration)
- EU: 65.8M members (8.9% penetration)
- 28–30% annual cancellation rate
- 12–15% total membership cancellations due to medical conditions
- 34% of UK exercisers quit in 1–3 months (injury/illness among top reasons)
- 2025 YTD data shows 85% of pre term cancellations are for Medical reasons
- Average term completed before cancellation is just 6 months into a 12 month contract

Sources: LeisureDB, EuropeActive, Statista, NHS referral data, Ashbourne management

Whats driving the numbers – The Size of Health Challenges

- 1 in 2 will face cancer in their lifetime
- 5M+ UK adults live with diabetes
- 7M+ with cardiovascular disease
- Millions with arthritis, injuries, post-surgery rehab needs

➔ Illness is one of the top 3 reasons for membership loss.





Future Trends in Health & Fitness – A model for the future fighting the backdrop of health uncertainty

- By 2030, 40% of UK adults will live with ≥ 1 chronic condition
- Hybrid & digital rehab memberships offer growth opportunity
- Wearables for real-time monitoring & coaching for health reassurance
- Corporate wellness & healthcare contracts
- Gyms repositioning as community health hubs

A group of women in purple athletic wear are celebrating at a race finish line. They are hugging and smiling broadly. One woman in the foreground has a race bib with the number 132. The background is blurred, showing other people and a pink flag.

Imagine this....

“Meet Sarah. She joined your gym after her breast cancer diagnosis—not to lose weight, but to feel strong again. Six months later, she’s still here. Not because she’s cured, but because your team made her feel seen.”

What if a third of your members faced a serious health setback tomorrow?

Myth Busting

“Sick people don’t belong in gyms.”

Wrong. Exercise is essential medicine:


- ✓ Cancer recovery – fatigue ↓ 30–50%
 - ✓ Diabetes – HbA1c ↓ ~0.5%
 - ✓ Cardiac rehab – re-admissions ↓ 25%
 - ✓ Musculoskeletal injuries – re-injury ↓ 40%
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The Science: Why a Gym environment helps Diabetes & Exercise

- Meta-analysis (158 RCTs): HIIT, aerobic & combined training ↓ HbA1c ~0.6%
- Gym-based resistance training > home-based (HbA1c ↓ 0.33%)
- High-intensity RT ↓ HbA1c ~0.61% vs 0.23% in low intensity
- Each +30min/week aerobic = HbA1c ↓ ~0.22%



The Science: How a gym can help Cancer Survivorship

- Fitness & strength cut cancer mortality by 31–46%
- Structured exercise ↓ recurrence & new cancers 28–37%
- Oncology rehab programs → retention lift 15–20%
- Group exercise boosts immunity, lowers stress hormones

How to adapt to cancer diagnosis and why?


Gyms that integrate **cancer rehabilitation** and **chronic illness-friendly programs** see **higher retention rates** and **stronger member loyalty**.

Physiological Benefits:

- Cancer survivors engaging in **strength training** and **low-impact cardio** see **reduced fatigue** and improved recovery.
- Social support **lowers stress hormones** and boosts adherence to exercise programs.

Some **UK gyms now offer specific oncology fitness programs** to help members **rebuild strength** post-treatment.

- ☑ **Staff Training:** Equipping trainers with knowledge on **exercise adaptations for cancer patients** and those recovering from surgery or chronic illness.
- ☑ **Community-Led Initiatives:** Support groups, **buddy systems**, and fitness programming for medical conditions.
- ☑ **Leveraging Partnerships:** Collaboration with **NHS health referral programs** and **European wellness initiatives** to create **member support structures**.



Training opportunities for investing for retention and loyalty

Investing in Training Courses for Fitness Coaches & PTs Working with Medical Conditions is a key tool for all clubs for the future to effectively support members with cancer, chronic illness, or rehabilitation needs.

fitness professionals can take **specialist training courses**:

- **Level 4 Exercise Specialist Courses (HFE UK)**
 - Covers **exercise adaptations for chronic illnesses, disabilities, and cancer rehabilitation.**
 - Developed by **medical doctors, physiotherapists, and dietitians.**
 - More details [here](#).
- **Level 3 Diploma in Exercise Referral (FIT UK Training)**
 - Focuses on **tailoring fitness programs for individuals with diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and cancer.**
 - Enables **PTs to take referrals from GPs, NHS, and private medical practitioners.**
 - More details [here](#).
- **UKIHCA Approved Health Coaching Training**
 - Provides **specialist coaching for fitness professionals** working with medical populations.
 - More details [here](#).

Ideas to action: A framework for implementation

Practical Implementation for Gyms & Trainers

Staff Workshops – Conduct **quarterly training** on special population fitness strategies.

Referral Partnerships – Connect with **local healthcare providers** for guided referrals.

Accreditation Pathways – Encourage **PTs to pursue Level 4 certifications** for medical-based fitness coaching.

Community Support Groups – Facilitate **peer-led recovery fitness** and social connection programs.

Adapted Workout Spaces – Create areas with **low-impact equipment, rehabilitation gear, and seated strength stations**.

The Business Case: investing for strong ROI

- Avg. member lifetime value (LTV):
£1,200/year
- Medical cancellations: 12–15%
churn → £100K lost revenue for a
1,000-member gym
- Retaining just 50 members at risk
= +£60K/year

**Supporting health challenges isn't
charity—it's smart business.**





The Playbook for health intervention Retention Strategies

1. Flexible Memberships – pause & rehab-to-regular tiers
2. Staff Upskilling – Level 3/4 medical exercise science
3. Community Activation – buddy systems, support groups
4. Healthcare Partnerships – NHS, GPs, charities
5. Storytelling – use member journeys as inspiration

Call to Action – What Next?

1. Audit cancellations & track health reasons
2. Pilot health-tier memberships
3. Train staff in medical exercise science
4. Build healthcare partnerships
5. Market your gym as a resilience hub

The gyms that thrive will be the ones that adapt to their consumer future needs beyond “training”



“Every gym has the potential to be a place of survival, recovery, and hope.
The question is: Will yours be?”

Case Studies: Proof in Action to investigate

Active Against Cancer (Harrogate NHS): oncology fitness programs

Nuffield Health (Bristol & Guildford): specialist rehab teams

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals: oncology rehab → 10% survival uplift

Everybody Health & Leisure: structured Level 4 cancer rehab

The 3-3-1 Playbook

3 Insights:

- Medical challenges drive membership loss
- Exercise delivers clinical outcomes like medicine
- Gyms can be recovery hubs, not just fitness spaces

3 Actions:

- Adapt memberships
- Upskill staff
- Build partnerships

1 Vision:

- Every gym becomes a sanctuary of resilience & recovery

