

Klain IP et al. (2015). *Self-determination and physical exercise adherence in the contexts of fitness academies and personal training.* J Hum Kinet. – Looks at autonomy support and motivational climate in gyms vs. 1:1 personal training and how that relates to adherence. ([PubMed](#))

Plain-English Summary for Clients (150–250 words)

This study looked at why some people stick with exercise while others drift away, and how the *environment*—big box gyms vs 1-to-1 personal training—affects that. Researchers surveyed 588 adults in Brazil, ages 18 to 88, who were either training on their own in a gym or working with a personal trainer. They used questionnaires to measure how supported people felt, how motivated they were, and how likely they were to keep exercising. [PubMed+1](#)

Overall, people in **personal training** felt their trainer gave them more choice, listened more, and helped them feel connected and capable. They also reported more *internal* motivation (exercising because it feels important or enjoyable) and better adherence. In contrast, typical gym users showed more “doing it because I have to” motivation and more lack of motivation. [ResearchGate](#)

For a typical client—especially someone deconditioned, older, or nervous about pain—this suggests that *how* you’re coached matters as much as the workout itself. When your coach involves you in decisions, explains the “why,” respects your limits, and builds your confidence, you’re more likely to show up, push yourself safely, and keep going long term. That’s key for goals like less pain, better strength, aging well, and feeling more at home in your body.

2. Key Findings for Coaches (Bullet Points)

- **Population:** 588 adults (405 “fitness academy” gym users, 183 personal-training clients) from Pelotas, Brazil; age 18–88. [ResearchGate](#)
- **Design:** Cross-sectional survey using SDT-based questionnaires: perceived autonomy support, basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness), and behavioral regulation (amotivation → extrinsic → intrinsic). [PubMed+1](#)
- **Context comparison:** Personal training vs general gym environment (“fitness academies”).
- **Main psych outcomes:** Personal-training clients reported **higher autonomy support, competence, and relatedness**, and more self-determined motivation (identified/intrinsic regulation). Gym users showed **higher amotivation and external regulation**. [ResearchGate](#)
- **Adherence:** More self-determined motivation was associated with better adherence to exercise; PT clients showed a more adherent profile overall (model fit supported SDT

pathways from autonomy support → basic needs → autonomous regulation → adherence). [ResearchGate](#)

- **Effect size:** Context (gym vs PT) had a statistically significant but small multivariate effect on self-determination (Wilks' $\lambda = 0.934$, $\eta^2 \approx 0.01$). [ResearchGate](#)
- **Programming variables:** Study didn't manipulate sets/reps/loading; it focused on *motivational climate* rather than specific training prescriptions.

3. Practical Coaching Takeaways

- **Coach behavior is a training variable.** Treat autonomy support (offering choices, explaining “why,” collaborative goal setting) as seriously as you treat load, volume, and tempo.
- **Build basic psychological needs:**
 - Autonomy – give options (“machine vs cable row”), invite input.
 - Competence – use achievable progressions and celebrate small wins.
 - Relatedness – be present, remember details about their life, create a safe space.
- **1:1 or small, high-touch settings may be especially powerful** for deconditioned, anxious, older, or pain-limited clients who need confidence and clarity to adhere.
- **For back pain/spinal fusion clients:** Emphasize collaboration (“we’ll adjust around your spine”), gradual mastery, and education so exercise feels like something *they* control, not something done *to* them.
- **Programming application:** Pair sound exercise science with a warm, autonomy-supportive style—especially during early weeks when dropout risk is highest.
- **System-level takeaway for gyms:** If you run groups or a “floor” environment, train all staff in autonomy-supportive communication to narrow the gap with personal training.

4. How to Explain This to a Client (Talking Points)

- “Studies show people stick with exercise longer when they feel supported, heard, and involved in the plan—not just told what to do.”

- “My job isn’t just to count reps; it’s to help you feel more confident, capable, and in control of your body.”
- “If something doesn’t feel right, we adjust together. You always have a say in how we train.”
- “The more this feels like *your* program instead of a punishment, the easier it is to stay consistent and see results.”

5. Limitations & Cautions

- **Design:** Cross-sectional; this is a snapshot in time, not a randomized trial. It shows associations, not proof that personal training *causes* better adherence. [PubMed+1](#)
- **Measurement:** Motivation and adherence were self-reported through questionnaires, which can be biased by memory or wanting to “look good.”
- **Context:** Sample was from gyms and PT in one Brazilian city; results may differ in other cultures, online coaching, medical exercise, or rehabilitation settings. [ResearchGate](#)
- **No specific exercise programming tested:** The study doesn’t tell us optimal sets, reps, or exercise types—only that motivational climate matters.
- **Scope of practice:** We should not promise that personal training will “cure” medical conditions or guarantee adherence; instead, we can say it *can* support motivation and consistency as part of a broader care team.

6. Dictionary of Acronyms (Used in This Summary)

- **SDT – Self-Determination Theory:** A framework explaining how feeling autonomous, competent, and connected helps people stay motivated over the long term.
- **BPN – Basic Psychological Needs:** Three core needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—that, when met, make exercise feel more satisfying and self-driven.

7. One-Sentence Bottom Line

Summary for coaches and Clients

When clients feel supported, involved, and capable—especially in a 1:1 coaching relationship—they're more likely to stick with exercise long enough to actually see and keep their results.