# Generation Z transforms UK social life as gyms replace pubs as key meeting spots



In recent years, the landscape of social interaction among young people in the UK has undergone a notable transformation, particularly for Generation Z. For many, the gym has supplanted the traditional social unifier of the pub. This shift is exemplified by individuals like Louis, a 20-year-old from Chichester. Rather than unwinding over drinks, he finds fulfilment in exercising while socialising, asserting, “I will text a friend to let them know when I’m going, and then just like that, I have someone to talk to for an hour or 90 minutes.”

Louis’s experience reflects a broader trend highlighted in a report by UKActive, which reveals that approximately 11.5 million people aged 16 and older are now gym members in the UK—a staggering new high. This finding not only signifies a growing consumer demand for gym facilities but also indicates a marked shift in societal priorities, with health and wellbeing taking centre stage. The report observed that around 27% of 18- to 24-year-olds view gym membership as a necessity, showcasing how fitness is becoming fundamental to the lifestyles of younger generations.

Many in this demographic are also embracing “sober socialising.” Research from Mintel shows that a sizable portion of young adults is gravitating away from alcohol, opting instead for activities like going to the gym. This change is driven by both health consciousness and the desire to save money; Louis notes, “Even an expensive gym membership costs less for a month than a single night out, making memories that I’ll have forgotten in the morning.” Such sentiments are echoed by a range of voices in the community, each sharing similar stories surrounding their exercise routines.

Niyi, a 25-year-old fitness enthusiast, is another advocate for this shift. Describing his gym visits as “a form of therapy,” Niyi highlights the social connections formed in this environment. “Most of my friends are interested in fitness in some form,” he affirms, revealing that his gym life has led to both personal and professional networking opportunities. With a monthly expenditure of £100 for his gym membership and an additional £80 for boxing classes, he views these expenses as investments in his overall health. This perspective aligns with findings from UKActive, which indicate that over half of UK gym-goers use their memberships to manage health conditions, substantially enhancing their mental wellbeing.

The media landscape reflects these sentiments as well. Erin, a 25-year-old editorial assistant from Cambridge, not only engages with fitness but also contributes to it through teaching classes at her gym. She appreciates the unique social atmosphere found in group exercises, stating, “There are no awkward silences… you can speak to someone if you want to.” Her belief is that the gym offers a subtle, but vital, social interaction that is often overlooked.

This generational shift also aligns with broader cultural trends. A significant portion of Generation Z appears to be rejecting traditional drinking norms. Research has shown that many young people in this cohort eschew alcohol entirely, with a notable portion of non-drinkers never having experienced alcohol at all. This departure from previous norms demonstrates a more experimental yet cautious approach to alcohol consumption, with an emphasis on personal health and wellbeing.

As gyms continue to flourish, they have evolved from mere exercise spaces to vibrant community hubs that cater to both physical and social needs. This transformation is notable not only for its implications on nightlife but also for the potential long-term public health benefits. By prioritising fitness, Generation Z is paving the way for a healthier lifestyle, which could alleviate some of the healthcare burdens faced by the NHS. Given these trends, the future of socialising in the UK might very well belong to the gym rather than the pub, leading to a nation that values both wellness and community in a shared environment.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/15/why-gym-place-to-be-uk-gen-z)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/15/why-gym-place-to-be-uk-gen-z), [[2]](https://www.ukactive.com/news/national-report-reveals-growing-consumer-demand-for-gyms-and-leisure-centres-as-ukactive-calls-for-government-to-slash-health-costs-for-nhs-and-business/), [[3]](https://www.mintel.com/insights/food-and-drink/gen-z-sober-curious-generation)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/15/why-gym-place-to-be-uk-gen-z), [[3]](https://www.mintel.com/insights/food-and-drink/gen-z-sober-curious-generation), [[6]](https://www.barandrestaurant.com/food-beverage/generational-drinking-trends-how-gen-z-stands-apart)
* Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/15/why-gym-place-to-be-uk-gen-z), [[4]](https://www.ukactive.com/news/january-gyms-over-half-of-brits-go-to-the-gym-to-manage-a-health-condition/)
* Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/15/why-gym-place-to-be-uk-gen-z), [[4]](https://www.ukactive.com/news/january-gyms-over-half-of-brits-go-to-the-gym-to-manage-a-health-condition/), [[5]](https://www.puregym.com/blog/uk-fitness-report-gym-statistics-2022-2023/)
* Paragraph 6: [[3]](https://www.mintel.com/insights/food-and-drink/gen-z-sober-curious-generation), [[6]](https://www.barandrestaurant.com/food-beverage/generational-drinking-trends-how-gen-z-stands-apart), [[7]](https://www.askattest.com/blog/research/gen-z-alcohol-trends)
* Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/15/why-gym-place-to-be-uk-gen-z), [[5]](https://www.puregym.com/blog/uk-fitness-report-gym-statistics-2022-2023/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/may/15/why-gym-place-to-be-uk-gen-z> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ukactive.com/news/national-report-reveals-growing-consumer-demand-for-gyms-and-leisure-centres-as-ukactive-calls-for-government-to-slash-health-costs-for-nhs-and-business/> - A report by ukactive reveals a significant increase in consumer demand for gyms and leisure centres, highlighting the importance of physical activity in improving health and reducing NHS costs. The report emphasizes the need for government support to promote physical activity and calls for increased awareness of health programs in gyms to tackle health crises and save costs for the NHS and economy.
3. <https://www.mintel.com/insights/food-and-drink/gen-z-sober-curious-generation> - Mintel's research indicates that Generation Z is increasingly adopting sober socializing habits, with nearly a third of 18- to 24-year-olds considering gym membership a necessity. The study highlights a shift in societal priorities toward health and well-being, with Gen Z opting for non-alcoholic social activities and viewing alcohol as an occasional treat rather than a regular part of socializing.
4. <https://www.ukactive.com/news/january-gyms-over-half-of-brits-go-to-the-gym-to-manage-a-health-condition/> - Research from ukactive reveals that over half of Brits use gym memberships to manage health conditions, with 78% citing improved mental health and well-being as a key motivation. The findings suggest a growing recognition of the holistic benefits of physical activity, including managing anxiety and depression, and call for government support to make physical activity more accessible to all communities.
5. <https://www.puregym.com/blog/uk-fitness-report-gym-statistics-2022-2023/> - PureGym's UK Fitness Report highlights that 14% of people in the UK are currently gym members, with an additional 19% planning to join in the next year. The report identifies health improvement as the primary reason for gym membership, followed by weight loss and muscle toning, indicating a strong focus on health and fitness among the UK population.
6. <https://www.barandrestaurant.com/food-beverage/generational-drinking-trends-how-gen-z-stands-apart> - An article discussing how Generation Z is reshaping drinking culture, with many rejecting traditional drinking norms. It highlights that over half of Gen Z non-drinkers have never had alcohol, and nearly two-thirds don’t plan on ever drinking. For those who do drink, choices reflect an experimental yet pragmatic mindset, with a preference for malt beverages and spirits like vodka and tequila.
7. <https://www.askattest.com/blog/research/gen-z-alcohol-trends> - Attest's research indicates that Generation Z's reduced alcohol consumption is driven by increased health consciousness and well-being. Unlike older generations, many Gen Zers prioritize maintaining their physical and mental health, leading to a decline in social drinking. The study also notes that nearly half of non-drinking Gen Zers are simply not interested in drinking, and a third abstain due to health concerns.