

What is CrossFit: Is it Made for Everyone?

By now some or many of you know what about the sport of CrossFit. There are a few of us sitting in this room today that are CrossFitters or probably have heard of CrossFit. What may you have heard about it? It's insane? It's dangerous? It causes rhabdomyolysis? Many have incredulous looks as they ponder why someone would do 100 pull-ups, 100 pushups, 100 sit-ups and 100 air squats, as fast as possible. CrossFit has hit mainstream from cover stories in Time and Fortune Magazine and even a parody on the T.V. show "The Simpsons." Take its grassroots beginning in the year 2000, to over 7000 worldwide affiliates, there are over 10 million CrossFitters, 35,000 trainers, Reebok swag and the "Games" televised on ESPN, CrossFit is taking the fitness industry by storm. CrossFit is especially popular among military service members with CrossFit gyms popping up downrange and on military bases. But the main question I want to ask and answer is: Is CrossFit for everyone?

Let's start in the beginning. What is CrossFit?

"100 words" of CrossFit is a foundational statement by the CEO, Greg Glassman. This is probably the best definition to describe what this movement is about.

"Eat meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, little starch and no sugar. Keep intake to levels that will support exercise but not body fat. Practice and train major lifts: Deadlift, clean, squat, presses, clean & jerk and snatch. Similarly, master the basics of gymnastics: pull-ups, dips, rope climb, push-ups, sit-ups, presses to handstand, pirouettes, flips, splits, and holds. Bike, run, swim, row, etc, hard and fast. Five or six days per week mix these elements in as many combinations and patterns as creativity will allow. Routine is the enemy. Keep workouts short and intense. Regularly learn and play new sports." Greg Glassman

In the *CrossFit Journal* the pyramid is another way to view CrossFit. If you notice, CrossFit emphasizes nutrition as the base. Then metabolic conditioning (or aerobic exercise running, rowing, jump roping), gymnastics, weightlifting and finally, sport. (In the pictures you can see this is only the 1%.)

The CrossFit Pyramid

Next, is to understand the basic programming of the workouts and the type of movements. Generally, CrossFit workouts are come down into this statement: “Constantly varied, functional movements performed at high intensity.” Let’s break this down.

Constantly Varied

Routine is the enemy. Working on bench press and legs alternating with “cardio” can become stale. Performance also peaks and levels at six weeks if you don’t vary the routine. The theory is that by constantly varying different types of movements and exercise, the recreational athlete or Warrior will be able to face anything that comes at them. Tony Horton, who popularized P90x, stated it well with his concept of “muscle confusion.” CrossFit attempts to train for the untrainable, with constantly varied exercise.

Functional Movements

CrossFit promotes functional, two-joint movements—movements that you will do during life normal activities. For example, when have you done a bicep curl in regular life activities? Most biceps movements involve supination and arm flexion, generally involved in lifting and reaching for things. How about overhead lifts? Do you routinely isolate your deltoids and keep your back inclined to put a heavy box on top of a shelf? Top functional exercises includes the squat (body-weight) and the deadlift. For example, a squat is simply the ability to sit and get up from a chair. Or, better yet, getting up from the ground. A deadlift is simply picking something off the ground. Whether it is a 20-lb box, a fallen Soldier on the battlefield, or a pencil dropped on the ground, we all have to do this basic functional movement.

- Heavy lifters are able to apply more power to activities than endurance athletes. Powerlifters – those who attempt to lift maximum weights within three attempts – are especially strong.
- Sprinters and people conditioned to do **Burst Training** are usually able to match the cardiovascular benefits and abilities of endurance athletes, but with less time spent training.
- Endurance athletes and bodybuilders are usually very specialized in their sport – for example, being aerobically fit or very muscular – but can be lacking in versatility (like having all-over strength, power or stamina).
- Doing **HIIT workouts** and training at high intensities (meaning workouts that would be unsustainable for long periods of time) lead to numerous health benefits, including **faster weight loss** along with more fat-burning and muscle-building.
- HIIT workouts can be done quickly (under an hour and sometimes much less) and don't require someone to work out every single day to maintain strength.

Is it made for Everyone? Absolutely.

Reason #1 - CrossFit really is for *everyone* at *any* fitness level.

CrossFit is probably the most versatile, scalable and modifiable fitness regimen on the planet! Our functional movements are a perfect exercise recipe to keep us oiled, sharpened and ready for the decades of quality life ahead of us.

While the most recognized aspect of CrossFit is for the chiseled hard body ladies and gentlemen who are the fittest of the fit, that aspect is just the tip of the iceberg. The real secret of CrossFit is what it means. When you walk into any CrossFit gym for a session, you will be heartily welcomed and encouraged to start at whatever level you're comfortable with.

Generally speaking, as I coach, I and others at the gym will focus on what you CAN do. You will then be taught and encouraged to do what you can do BETTER. You'll then ultimately be coached to help you do MORE than you were capable of doing when you

first arrived. The great thing about this model is that you are most likely to be surprised by what you are able to accomplish after a relatively short period of time.

You can also rest assured that there will NEVER be judgment for your present fitness level and only enormous respect for wanting to change for the better. You'll probably NEVER find a more encouraging environment!

Reason #2 - CrossFit PERFECTLY addresses our diminishing flexibility.

It becomes obvious that we begin to lose the overall flexibility and range of motion that we once had. This was especially obvious to me when I first started CrossFit and as I've aged.

Being that CrossFit is designed around multi joint, compound movements commonly referred to as "Functional Movements," we will call into play a wider range of demands to discover and rectify ANY limitations we might uncover. Since we all age differently, CrossFit is the PERFECT tool to not only discover our own unique areas of reduced capacity, but to utilize these real life, functional movements, to keep us supple and flexible from here on out.

We encourage daily stretching and spending a hour on yoga because flexibility becomes the medicine to working out.

Reason #3 - CrossFit will reintroduce us to our basic, inherent & childlike sense of fun!

Unfortunately, many of us have lost our very basic sense of what it means to play! Let's face it, running, jumping, climbing, swinging, flipping large tires & climbing walls is playground type fun that I'm certain the most of us thought was gone forever.

Jumping rope is a prime example of what you'll learn when walk in the door... Whether you pick it up without "skipping a beat" as it were, or struggle to get two in a row, you're certain to have FUN working at it.

George Bernard Shaw made the keen observation that "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing." Guess what everyone.. CrossFit again has the perfect solution to the problem. Come and join us. The playground is open!

Reason #4 - The CrossFit approach to strength training ideally addresses our individual needs.

While strength training is only one component in CrossFit, it is a MAJOR component. Many CrossFit programs (including ours) dedicate a specific time during every session to a controlled, coached, systematic approach to making us stronger. While there are probably dozens of specific benefits to weightlifting for the any age group, I can say in general that the evidence we've gleaned in the last few years indicates that strength training is overall, a bedrock foundation of health and wellness. ESPECIALLY as we get older.

Reason #5 - CrossFit presents us with significant challenges.

In order to live a life that is full and meaningful it is imperative that we are continually challenged. In education we call it Growth Mindset. By this I mean a level of challenge that truly tests our mental and physical makeup. A challenge that will tempt us to want to quit and to wonder if we can really finish what we've started.

CrossFit will never be a piece of cake and will always be a dragon to slay or a challenge to conquer. Be it a personal record, an impressive amount of work over a short period of time or a long and grueling set of tasks to work through one by one, at the end of each workout we're presented with a genuine opportunity to be proud of a significant accomplishment.

Reason #6 - Misery Loves Company.

A basic and important aspect of CrossFit revolves around the group exercise model. No one can deny that a group element can help to motivate any of us to push on when things get tough. As aches and pains conspire to keep us from performing, the group camaraderie can help us to realize that we're all in the same boat and will certainly continue to motivate us as we progress. We certainly aren't alone in this and the group environment helps us to push on despite the difficulty.

Reason #7 - We all age differently and no matter what our specific need is, we've got you covered!

The very heart of the CrossFit methodology is that we work within a model of fitness that is comprised of ten specific and generally accepted skills. It is fascinating to me that as we age, we all suffer a loss of each of these skills or attributes in very unique and individual ways. What other fitness regimen regularly includes and addresses each

of these attributes? Regularly visiting each of these facets provides us with ample opportunity to identify weaknesses and through training & practice empower us to correct and individually improve (and as we age maintain) our collective, overall fitness.

So What about Injuries?

As I look at you, I can't say it's impossible to be injured doing CrossFit. Early in my CrossFit experience I dislocated my shoulder and one of the coaches had a major accident that caused a broken vertebrae.