CrossFit


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Definition

CrossFit is a strength and conditioning program that combines a number of activities, including weightlifting, sprinting, powerlifting, rowing, gymnastics, plyometrics, and medicine ball training. The sport was originally designed to train police officers, special military forces, martial artists, and specialty athletes, but it has since been expanded to include men, women, and children of all ages and skill backgrounds. Program sponsors claim that CrossFit aims to be "broad, general, and inclusive." They claim that the skills needed in specialty activities, like police work and professional football, are different in degree, not in kind, from those needed by the ordinary person in his or her daily life. The name CrossFit is a registered trademark of CrossFit, Inc., incorporated in the state of California.

Purpose

The stated purpose of CrossFit is to "increase work capacity across broad times and modal domains." The program attempts to help participants achieve the maximum possible level of achievement in every physical aspect of their lives. This reflects the belief of founder Greg Glassman that the best measure of a person's overall health is not any one medical measurement (such as blood pressure) or combination of them, but one's overall fitness. Training for a healthy life demands that a person push his or her body to achieve the highest degree of physical fitness possible.

Demographics

No official count of the number of CrossFit participants is available but the program is in use at over 2,000 facilities worldwide. It is also part of training programs operated by a number of law enforcement agencies, fire departments, and military agencies. CrossFit has a special program for children and young adults ranging in age from four to 17. The program is divided into age groups that include Buttercups (age 4-6), Puppies (age 5-8), Pack Members (age 9-11), The Porch (age 10-12), and Big Dawgs (age 13-17).

History

CrossFit was founded in the 1980s by former high school gymnast Greg Glassman and his then wife, Lauren. After graduating from high school in 1974, Glassman took a job as a physical trainer at the Pasadena, California, YMCA, where he worked with professional athletes, emergency responders, and other specialized athletes, as well as with the general public. He was somewhat surprised to find that many of his supposedly well-trained clients were lacking in some skills that might be thought to be
essential in their lines of work. Over time, he developed a series of workouts that became the basis of CrossFit. These exercises combined traditional body building exercises, such as curls and raises, with high intensity aerobic exercises, such as sprinting. Glassman was convinced that this combination of otherwise distinct exercises provided the key to helping an individual reach his or her maximum possible physical fitness.

Glassman built his first formal CrossFit gym in his garage in Santa Cruz, California, in 1995. The same year, he was hired to train members of the Santa Cruz police department in his new approach to physical fitness. CrossFit grew exponentially, from 18 affiliated gyms in 2005 to more than 2,000 affiliated facilities in 2011. A turning point in the company's growth was establishment of its first Internet site in 2001. Individuals who would otherwise never have heard of CrossFit learned about the program on the Web and found out about the exercises promoted by the program. CrossFit not only operates its programs through its affiliate members, but additionally, the company encourages individuals to construct their own home gym that contains all the equipment needed to participate in the program.

**Description**

Glassman wrote a 100-word description of what he calls an ideal fitness program. That program begins with a nutritional diet emphasizing meat, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and fruit, with little starch and little or no fruit. The goal of this diet is to keep one's body weight at a point that will support exercise, but not permit weight gain. In addition, Glassman calls for individuals to develop skills in three major areas: power lifting (such as cleans, squats, and presses), gymnastics (such as pull-ups, push-ups, and sit-ups), and aerobics (such as biking, swimming, and rowing). Glassman recommends a four- or five-day exercise week, in which a mix of activities is practiced every day.

CrossFit exercises can be performed in two different contexts: at affiliated facilities, where training is conducted under the supervision of a trained and licensed instructor, or in the privacy of one's own home. The company recommends that home training be guided by the skill level of an individual prior to participation in the program. Thus, some people will be able to begin immediately on exercises recommended by CrossFit, while others will have to learn those same exercises at a slower pace over a period of time.

The core of the CrossFit program is the Workout of the Day (WOD), a set of exercises recommended by the company at its affiliates and on its website for each day of the year. Each day, the WOD consists of a different set of exercises calling on the three major areas of exercise. These exercises include activities such as back squat, ball slam, bench press, cleans, deadlift, dumbbell moves, hand stands, jump-rope skills, kettle bell exercises, medicine ball work, presses, pull-ups, push-ups, rope climbing, rowing sprinting, and wall ball. One or more days a week are designated as rest days on which no exercises are to be performed. A typical WOD might be the following:

- 15 ft (5 m) Rope climb, 5 ascents
- 145 lb (66 kg) Clean and jerk, 5 reps
- 15 ft (5 m) Rope climb, 4 ascents
- 165 lb (75 kg) Clean and jerk, 4 reps
- 15 ft (5 m) Rope climb, 3 ascents
- 185 lb (84 kg) Clean and jerk, 3 reps
- 15 ft (5 m) Rope climb, 2 ascents
- 205 lb (93 kg) Clean and jerk, 2 reps
- 15 ft (5 m) Rope climb, 1 ascent
- 225 lb (102 kg) Clean and jerk, 1 rep

Since the skill emphasis (strength, speed, endurance, etc.) differs each day, the next day's WOD might look very different from the one shown here.

In addition to its exercise program, CrossFit sponsors an international competition to find the person who is "fittest on Earth." The competition occurs in three stages. In the first stage, an open competition is held in which individuals complete a series of exercises at a licensed affiliate or (video-
taped) at their own home. In 2011, more than 26,000 athletes participated in this competition. The competitors are divided into three groups: individual, team, and masters. The masters category, in turn, is sub-divided into four age groups: 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, and 60 plus. Winners of the open competition then move to the second stage, the regional games. These are held in each of the company's 17 regions around the world: Australia, Canada West, North Central, South East, Northern California, Mid Atlantic, Europe, Canada East, Africa, Asia, North West, South West, Central East, North East, Latin America, Southern California, and South Central. Winners at the regional level then go on to the third stage, the Reebok CrossFit Games, held in the United States. Reebok, sponsor of the games, awards individual men's and women's winners US$250,000 each (in 2011).

**Preparation**

The main aspect of preparing for CrossFit activities is assessing one's current level of physical preparedness. Some individuals have strong backgrounds in the type of exercises included in the WOD and can begin those workouts without further preparation. Other individuals must begin with simpler exercises to prepare for the WOD on a regular basis.

**Equipment**

The personal equipment needed for CrossFit is relatively simple, consisting of items such as squat shoes, a lifting belt, lifting straps, knee wraps, wrist wraps, elbow wraps, gloves, and items needed for specialized activities, such as devices used to hold a bar while performing an exercise. The range of equipment needed to perform the WOD, however, is long and expensive. A partial list of equipment includes items such as:

- mats
- dumbbells
- pull-up bars
- dip station
- flat bench
- squat rack
- rower
- parallettes
- Still rings
- ropes
- climbing holds
- campus board
- peg board
- ab bench
- plyometrics box
- kettlebells
- jump rope
- medicine ball
- road or mountain bike
- video camera
- stop watch
- marker board

Fitness clubs generally have all or the vast majority of this equipment, so anyone can take part in CrossFit exercises at such clubs. The organizers of CrossFit have attempted to simplify this list in order to make it possible for individuals to build their own home gym.

**Training and conditioning**

Since CrossFit is a training and conditioning program itself, there is generally no special preparation needed to become involved in the activity. People with little or no background in exercises used in the
WOD will need to become familiar and more skilled in the basic training exercises at a slower rate than those who already have background in the skills.

**Risks**

CrossFit exercises place severe stress on all body systems, raising the health risks associated with the program. These risks range from shoulder separations to sprained wrists or ankles, to bruises, concussion from falls, and an increased risk of cardiac events. CrossFit officials have never shied from the range of risks associated with the program. They state that individuals concerned about those risks should not participate in the program.

An example of the risk associated with some CrossFit exercises is the medical condition known as rhabdomyolysis, a condition resulting from the rapid breakdown of muscle tissue associated with vigorous exercise. Muscle fiber components (myoglobin) produced during breakdown enter the bloodstream and may cause damage to the kidneys. A U.S. sailor who experienced rhabdomyolysis after a CrossFit workout successfully sued the company for US$300,000 as a result of his injuries. Health risks associated with CrossFit exercises are of sufficient concern that the company has established its own health insurance unit, CrossFit Risk Retention Group, a self-insurance agency to deal with injuries associated with the company's *conditioning* program.

**Results**

During the first decade of the twenty first century, CrossFit was one of the most successful *conditioning* and training programs in the world. Relatively little formal research has been conducted on the CrossFit program. One important exception is a 2010 study conducted by the U.S. Army of 14 military athletes who participated in a CrossFit program for eight weeks. The study found that all participants made significant improvement in their ability to work at various exercises, participants who were weakest at the outset of training made the greatest improvement, and participants made gains in virtually every measure of fitness.

**Key Terms**

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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parallelettes</td>
<td>Small parallel bars similar in shape, but smaller in size, than parallel bars used in gymnastics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plyometrics</td>
<td>Any exercise designed to improve muscle power by repeated and rapid stretching, followed by contraction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhabdomyolysis</td>
<td>A medical condition resulting from the rapid breakdown of muscle tissue associated with vigorous exercise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workout of the Day (WOD)</td>
<td>A set of exercises recommended by CrossFit for participants to complete each day. The WOD is posted on the company's website daily.</td>
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**Questions to ask your doctor**

- What is your position about the relative risks and benefits of CrossFit training?
- What are the arguments for and against CrossFit training versus specialized training for specific sports?
- Is it reasonable for me to expect that I can get maximum value out of CrossFit training if I have to work out of my own home, rather than a fitness center?
- What steps can I take to reduce possible health risks associated with CrossFit training?
For More Information

Books


Websites


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Record Number: DU2618770055

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