



Chances are you know someone who does CrossFit.

Whether they are the co-worker who constantly talks about his WOD, the old college friend who suddenly has Michelle Obama-arms or your neighbor who does burpees in his driveway, it's hard to deny that this fitness trend is here to stay.

So we sat down with certified personal trainer and CrossFit level 1 coach, Jonathon Ross, to talk about the basics of this very popular workout.

Here's what we learned.

## **What is it?**

CrossFit is a program developed to offer a full-body workout that combines elements of cardio, weight lifting, gymnastics, core training and more to prepare the body for the unexpected.

According to the [CrossFit website](#): *"CrossFit is the principal strength and conditioning program for many police academies and tactical operations teams, military special*

*operations units, champion martial artists, and hundreds of other elite and professional athletes worldwide."*

This high-intensity workout is extremely varied and all about getting the most bang for your workout buck. A CrossFitter will likely never do the same routine twice in one week and each workout will usually last between 45 minutes to an hour.

CrossFit gyms are usually large warehouses (often referred to as the "box") which offer group classes where an individual may choose to workout anywhere between three to five times a week. CrossFit coaches either develop their own daily workout or follow the "WOD" or Workout of the Day from the [CrossFit website](#).

For example, a typical CrossFit WOD may look like this:

### **Sample WOD:**

#### **20 Min AMRAP (As Many Rounds As Possible)**

- 100m Run
- 2 Burpees
- 2 Deadlifts 185lb
- 2 Pull-ups

AMRAP means that you will do your best to complete as many rounds of this sequence as possible in the time allotted; in this case 20 minutes.

To learn more about this fitness regimen, read on.

### **What do people love about it?**



CrossFit classes are high-intensity group classes focused on the philosophy of high-intensity interval training or HIT, the belief that more **intense exercise in a shorter amount of time** is more effective.

CrossFitters are also part of a unique culture and philosophy. Many CrossFitters follow a specific **diet**, namely the Paleo Diet, and are fitness fanatics or former athletes who thrive off of competition and a team atmosphere (but that doesn't mean nonathletes can't reap the CrossFit benefits).

CrossFit addicts love the communal environment of this workout regimen and appreciate the verbal encouragement and support that they gain from their teammates and coaches while they exercise.

Sometimes criticized for just how intense the workout can be, CrossFit teaches its followers to accept discomfort, push your body to its limits and therefore bring yourself to a place of maximum impact. CrossFit operates off of the belief that you should train your body for the unknown and be physically prepared for almost anything.

While this philosophy may be intimidating to some, it is inspiring and motivational to its followers.

## **What's limiting about it?**

Okay, so we've talked about what people love about CrossFit, but what about the stuff that trainers and attemptees are not so crazy about?

CrossFit is a high-intensity sport, meaning that it opens athletes up to the risk of injury if certain exercises are not properly executed. Almost all CrossFit gyms offer what is called an "On Ramp" or "Elements" course. These courses typically last between two weeks to a month and will teach you the [9 Foundational Movements of CrossFit](#) and the proper form for each. This is an essential part avoiding injury as a CrossFit beginner.

However, that doesn't mean all athletes are safe. "CrossFit's greatest strength is also its greatest weakness," said Ross of the exercise regimen. "People have that 'finish at all costs' mentality and there's a little bit of a lunatic fringe that runs in the culture."

Ross says that often the coaches' explanations of the exercises are thorough and accurate; however because of the group setting, individuals are not always getting the appropriate one on one follow up needed to make sure that they are executing the moves correctly. This in turn, can make beginners very vulnerable to injury.

It is also worth noting that CrossFit classes cost a pretty penny. Most classes range from anywhere between \$25 per class to \$150 per month.

Still thinking about giving CrossFit a try? Read on to learn helpful tips for any CrossFit beginner.

## Tips for Trying CrossFit

If you've never tried CrossFit before and you think it may be the right workout for you, here are some helpful tips for staying safe:

- Go to a few different gyms, talk to the coaches and get an idea for what the workout entails. Most CrossFit gyms offer a free introductory class to beginners considering joining the program. This is a great way to meet your potential CrossFit coach.
- Be sure to make your coaches aware of any previous injuries **before** attempting any CrossFit exercises. If you have a serious pre-existing injury you may even want to speak with your doctor before purchasing a package for this high-intensity program.

- **Before attempting CrossFit** you should have a basic understanding of general fitness. As Jonathon puts it, "You wouldn't add weight to the Leaning Tower of Pisa, so don't add weight to a squat with poor form." Be sure to take an "On Ramp" or "Elements" course (mentioned on the previous page) to ensure you'll complete WODs safely and effectively.
- **Scale your workouts.** This is something that is discussed a lot in the CrossFit culture. To "scale your workout" means that you, as a beginner, cannot lift as much weight as CrossFit Chris who has been doing this for years. This also applies to intensity and knowing when your body has reached its maximum capacity.

For all medical questions speak with your doctor and consult your CrossFit coach.

## About the Expert



Jonathan Ross

Jonathan Ross is a Discovery Fit & Health [blogger](#) and author of the book *Abs Revealed*. Ross is also a certified personal trainer by the American Council in Exercise and certified CrossFit level 1.

Jonathan invites you to join his cruise through Alaska for "A Better You" coming this summer. For more information, see [here](#).

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## Gender at the Gym: How Workout Preferences Vary by Sex, Age

By: [Alia Hoyt](#)



People take part in CrossFit training in a gym in Paris on Jan. 16, 2015. Surveys show men and women equally participate in niche activities like this, lessening the gender divide in workouts. **BERTRAND**



Although the stereotyped image of a fitness club is a room crowded with people walking treadmills and using weight machines, that picture is as stale as, maybe, your exercise routine. In late December 2017, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported that many traditional health clubs were scaling back on exercise machines and beefing up their group fitness class offerings, in response to consumer demand.

Which got us thinking: Which groups prefer fitness classes as opposed to using equipment? A 2017 study by the [International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association \(IHRSA\)](#) found that more than 57 million Americans belonged to at least one health club, and while gym memberships were split almost evenly between males and females, the two groups prioritized their gym activities very differently.

"Males tend to be equipment-oriented, engaging more in using free weights (dumbbells, hand weights and barbells), weight/resistance machines, rowers and stationary cycles," says Melissa Rodriguez, senior research manager for the IHRSA in an email interview. "Women prefer to participate in group exercise programs, such as Pilates, dance, step, and other choreographed exercise to music, [yoga](#) and barre."

Obviously, there are men who enjoy classes and women who lift weights, but in general it has not been the norm. "This is a combination of social dynamics, men tending to be more solo and women tending to gravitate towards the community, and men thinking the classes themselves are geared towards women and their goals," says Doug Holt with [Fitness Professionals Online](#).

But this dynamic could also be changing. The [same study](#) found that men and women had almost the same levels of participation in "fitness-only and personal or small group training (P/SGT) studios" (think [CrossFit](#) or kickboxing studios). This trend is likely to continue as [Millennials](#) and Generation Z (those under 18) tend to favor these types of workouts, along with HIIT, barre, yoga and group cycling. IHRSA reported that the average age of a studio member is 30, and nearly half of all health club members are 18-44.

"Because functional training continues to grow in popularity, there's less of a need for specific age groups, and/or genders to be reliant on machines," says Josh Leve, founder of the [Association of Fitness Studios](#) in an email. "Bodyweight training is very popular and ensuring that you can move well into your 60s and 70s is high on the list of areas trainers, studios and health facilities tend to focus on."

But equipment (ellipticals, free weights and treadmills) is still the primary workout for [Gen Xers](#), with boot camp being the only non-equipment-based activity listed as a favorite with this age group. Not surprisingly, [Boomers](#) and members of the Silent Generation (typically those born between 1925-45) prefer the gentler routines like water aerobics, Tai Chi and stretching, though they also favor weight machines.

## **The Changing Face of Fitness**

Eric Malzone, with the Fitness Marketing Alliance, owned a CrossFit gym in Santa Barbara, California, until recently. Female business started off slowly, but he recalls a significant shift once the benefits were realized. "A lot of women were very hesitant to join a gym with a lot of weightlifting," he says, adding that they were afraid of getting bulky. "Women started to really enjoy being strong. That love of the actual fitness part of it really started to overtake. It became a larger motivator with women to come in and get strong and hit certain numbers on their lists."

Malzone is quick to point out that age and gender aren't everything, particularly for hard-core fitness boutiques. "The demographic wasn't as important as the psychographic of people who very much wanted to challenge themselves," he says, noting that ex-athletes in particular tend to gravitate in that direction because they miss the coaching and team-based environment.

Although the IHRSA reports that independent use of equipment like resistance weights and cardio machines continues to decline in favor of group exercise classes, 44 percent of survey respondents had used a treadmill over the past year — showing it is still popular. Resistance machines and free weights/dumbbells rank second and third. Among group exercises, yoga was most popular, with 36 percent of survey respondents reporting participation, followed by stretching and calisthenics.



But no matter what your age or gender, when it comes to going to a gym, one point remains constant, according to Leve of the Association of Fitness Studios. "The best thing for a consumer is to find what they enjoy so it doesn't become a chore."

## Now That's Interesting

What's next for health clubs? The IHRSA thinks it will be equipment and technology that enhances social engagement (like apps that allow club members to compete against each other or form exercise groups — even with people in other countries). It also favors virtual reality — for instance, virtual programs where club members can participate in classes when a traditional instructor is not available.