

# THE CROSSFIT CRAZE

By Heidi Creed

"Transform your body exercising just minutes a day."

"Gain lean muscle mass and become stronger and more fit than ever before."

While these may be the claims of many paid late-night TV programs, this description of benefits derived from the CrossFit regimen is no infomercial. This is an intense, gutsy and gritty workout program that is the real deal with a large underground, almost cult-like following.

## WHAT IS CROSSFIT?

Santa Cruz native and former gymnast Greg Glassman created the CrossFit concept more than a couple of decades ago. He used what he experienced from gymnastics and what he observed from bodybuilding to create a well-rounded and functional workout that anyone could benefit from.



Photo by Peter Weber/fotojack.com



CrossFit Los Angeles  
Photo by Janine Roach

CrossFit is based on three main principles: functionality, intensity and variety. The program boasts that due to its scalability, a granny and a cage fighter could essentially use the same program and achieve their own exceptional, albeit relative, results.

CrossFit has since become the go-to strength and conditioning program for many police academies, military special operations units and hundreds of other elite and professional athletes worldwide. But thanks to its flexibility, CrossFit has successfully worked its way into the just-off mainstream market by sheer word-of-mouth exposure, as the founder does no special promotions or ad campaigns.

"I found out about it from a friend about two years ago. So when I started doing CrossFit on my own at the gym people would always ask me what I was doing. But now if I'm at another gym I hear 'that looks like a CrossFit workout,'" says Jay Soto, 30, owner of CrossFit Thousand Oaks.

Andy Petranek of Petranek Fitness in Santa Monica also speaks to the increase in popularity, "I found out about it on the Internet about three years ago before anyone knew about it... Only about 20 people were posting their workout accomplishments, and now it's in the hundreds."

While there are upwards of 300 CrossFit affiliates worldwide and more than a dozen in the L.A. area, where you can go to participate in small group classes or receive private training, CrossFit also has a strong online commu-

nity where any self-motivated individual can get the workout of the day (WOD), which is posted for free every day. It is a virtual gym full of crazed CrossFit-ites competing with their own personal bests, or against someone they'll never meet. A visit to the web site at [crossfit.com](http://crossfit.com) is a must, as seeing is believing what this sensation is all about.

## THE WORKOUT

"It makes elite fitness accessible. It allows you to do anything in life better and faster," says Petranek enthusiastically. Since the movements are never done in isolation, you are training for real life and sport situations, moving all of your joints in very intense, often in explosive or anaerobic ways, with little rest. "This is not for people who like to avoid feeling what they're doing," he adds.

Most workouts are either based on quantity (doing as many as you can in a given time) or for time (repetitions are set, you see how long it takes you to complete them), always working at the highest intensity your body can safely maintain.

Take one of the staple workouts called Cindy. All you have to do is 5 pull-ups, 10 push-ups and 15 squats as many times through as you can in 20 minutes. Looks easy enough on paper right? You better believe they add up quickly making the demand

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CrossFit Los Angeles  
Photo by Janine Roach

tough, requiring a seriously focused and committed effort to complete.

A quantity workout might look something like Angie. With a stopwatch running you complete 100 pull-ups, 100 push-ups, 100 sit-ups and 100 squats. Now remember, these are scalable and modifiable to individual abilities and to a level that is challenging yet realistic. Not many people can expect to bust out 100 pull-ups, especially in the beginning, but talk to anyone devoted to the program and they will tell you with great confidence that you will get there if you stick with it.

"When I first started I could do just a few pull-ups, and after just a month of doing these workouts I can do several without a problem. The difference is amazing," says triathlete Britt Petty, 35, of Los Angeles.

Here lies the real beauty where traditional programs waver: progress is perfectly quantifiable. Because all workouts are comprehensive, complementary and pre-determined, "you may do one workout in January, then not do it again until February but you're sure to see progress in time or quantity - or both," says Soto.



CrossFit Los Angeles  
Photo by Janine Roach

Conventional wisdom says you can't achieve aerobic and strength conditioning in one workout, and much less at just 20 or 30 minutes a day. While you may log a workout time of just 12 minutes (not including warm-up or cool down), you more than likely will not be begging for more, but in the short time you have taxed your system in a way that elevates your stamina.

"I am just so much stronger.

It's made me realize fitness is not all about cardio," adds Petty. Thus no longer are two-hour sessions at the gym badge-worthy when following this program. In fact in CrossFit terms, you get the badge if you're in and out in say 15 minutes, but still walking of course. For this is the sign of true fitness and efficiency.

### SOUNDS GOOD, BUT...

Cardio junkies, bulk-a-phobes, and quality assurance folks may raise their brows at some of these premises. Such traditionalists may balk at racing against the clock. The natural question is how much quality is compromised when you're going for speed. The response to this is simply responsible training where proper form is brutally enforced.

"We absolutely emphasize form first. Before you can increase weight you have to master the technique. Always take quality before intensity," says Steve Melero of The Performance Zone in Westlake Village.

Cardio enthusiasts also may obsess over the lack of extensive aerobic sessions. "Studies have shown that time and moderate pace are not critical to weight loss. Working at a high intensity for a short amount of time taxes your system in a way that lasts for hours, keeping your metabolism elevated while it's working to recover," explains Petranek. To avoid bulking up, simply decrease the weight and increase the reps.

### THE SECRET HANDSHAKE

While Glassman certainly believed in what he was developing, he likely didn't expect it to evolve the way it has. CrossFit is almost like a secret club, complete with its own language to describe workouts, online community for posting workout accomplishments, and even its own "mascots" Pukey and Uncle Rhabdo, to describe the extreme fatigue, if you will, one might feel after completing some of these ultra-intense, particularly short sessions.

And in case you were wondering, the workouts are often named after girls because they reminded Glassman of hurricanes, or after fallen soldiers who loved a routine or had one dedicated in their name.

The CrossFit craze has trickled down to the wee ones too, further demonstrating its ability span to generations and abilities. The CrossFit Kids program follows the same principles of incorporating coordination, flexibility, strength, agility, and balance, even following the quantity or for-time format. But naturally it's adapted in a way that is always fun and age appropriate.

Finally, an exercise program that Grandma, Mom, Dad, and Suzie can all do together. <<

## CROSSFIT ON THE WEB

CrossFit web site  
[crossfit.com](http://crossfit.com)

Anaheim Hills  
Canyon CrossFit  
[www.canyoncrosfit.com](http://www.canyoncrosfit.com)

Buena Park  
CrossFit Buena Park  
[maxfitusa.com](http://maxfitusa.com)

Fullerton  
CrossFit Road Warriors  
[www.crossfitroadwarriors.com](http://www.crossfitroadwarriors.com)

Huntington Beach  
CrossFit HB  
[crossfithb.com](http://crossfithb.com)

CrossFit Marina  
[crossfitmarina.com](http://crossfitmarina.com)

Inland Empire  
CrossFit Inland Empire  
[crossfitie.typepad.com](http://crossfitie.typepad.com)

Long Beach  
CrossFit Long Beach  
[crossfitlongbeach.com](http://crossfitlongbeach.com)

Los Angeles  
West Coast CrossFit  
[westcoastcrossfit.com](http://westcoastcrossfit.com)

San Gabriel Valley  
Elite Fitness Bootcamp  
[elitefitnessbootcamp.net](http://elitefitnessbootcamp.net)

Santa Monica  
CrossFit Los Angeles  
[petranekfitness.com](http://petranekfitness.com)

Thousand Oaks  
CrossFit Thousand Oaks  
[crossfitthousandoaks.com](http://crossfitthousandoaks.com)

Valencia  
CrossFit Valencia  
[crossfitvalencia.com](http://crossfitvalencia.com)

Van Nuys  
Valley CrossFit  
[valleycrossfit.com](http://valleycrossfit.com)

Westlake Village  
CrossFit Performance Zone  
[completefitness.com](http://completefitness.com)