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The CrossFit Advantage

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By Kenya McCullum

After Marine Corps Col. John Jansen, a pilot, had hip-replacement surgery, he wanted to find a challenging workout that would help him rehabilitate — and get him back into shape to fly again. But he also was concerned about being pushed too far and getting injured as he healed. On the recommendation of a colleague, Jansen started doing [CrossFit](#) — a strength and conditioning program — and realized he had found the workout that would meet all of his needs in a safe and efficient way. “Just over the past couple of weeks, I have found myself moving past the pain at a rate that I have not seen at all since the surgery,” Jansen says. “The instructor is extremely sensitive to my situation and my condition and tailors the exercises accordingly to really optimize the workout.” And that’s what CrossFit is all about, according to Jimi Letchford, chief branding officer.



CrossFit, developed in the 1970s, is designed to provide a challenging and fun workout to members of the military and civilians alike. The reason why the workout is so effective, Letchford says, is because it’s based on three basic principles: constant variation, functional movements, and high intensity.

A workout of constant change

To keep “CrossFitters” on their toes and prevent them from experiencing the boredom that might otherwise set in by doing the same workouts all the time, a team of athletes at CrossFit change the workouts on a regular basis.

“The workout you’ll do today will be nothing like what you’ll do tomorrow,” Letchford says. “Sometimes we won’t repeat a workout ever, or we’ll wait for several months down the road. This is because CrossFitters are being trained for the unknown and unknowable — which is especially important for a military person. You’re really only as fit as your experiences, so we try to make an athlete experience as much as he or she can, so when they come up against something in their line of work, or their sport, or whatever it may be, they’ve at least experienced something similar to it.”

To do this, the CrossFit staff change all the elements of each workout — including how long the workout takes, what type of gear is used, what time of day the workout should be done, and whether a routine should be done before or after eating a meal.

Movement: It’s only natural

CrossFit routines are based on functional movements, meaning they are similar to movements we use in our everyday lives — at home and on the job. Unlike other kinds of workouts, which are based on movements that are only found at the gym, the movements you will find in a CrossFit routine are more natural to your body and your day-to-day life.

“They’re really things that we’re born to do,” Letchford says. “It’s in our genetics to be able to sit, to stand, to come out of a seated position, and to pick something up. This is what makes CrossFit really safe. The movements that you usually see inside a gym are invented just for the gym — you’re not going to see them on the job site or in the household.”

Becoming more adept at everyday movements can have long-term benefits — whether you’re in the military or not — says Dr. Ahmik Jones, who specializes in diagnostic radiology. Because remaining ambulatory as we age is a key to independence during our golden years, Jones says practicing these basic movements can mean the difference between staying in our own homes as seniors or being placed in a nursing home.

“Building up strength in the major muscle movers in the body makes it so that 50 years from now, you’ll never come to a point in your life where you can’t live independently based on just not being able to perform normal activities in life,” says Jones.

The intensity that’s right for you

Many workouts can be a bear for some and a breeze for others. But with CrossFit, anyone can achieve a high-intensity workout, because the routines are scalable for everyone who does them. Whether you’re a soldier or an elderly grandmother, it doesn’t matter. CrossFit can be scaled in such a way that you receive the maximum benefits without getting injured.

“When you do CrossFit, you don’t have to be strong [or] super fit, and regardless of age, shape, or size, everyone can do it — and it’s absolutely life changing,” says Desiree Sanchez, a captain in the Marine Corps. Sanchez admits when she first started doing CrossFit, she felt somewhat intimidated and didn’t think, as a woman, she could keep up with the workouts.

“Doing CrossFit is very empowering,” Sanchez says. “As a female, there’s a misconception that you can’t do certain things, and I’ve found that, as I’ve kept on going with the program, I have gotten exponentially stronger and I do things now that before I thought, ‘Well, I can’t do that, I’m a girl.’ ”

Being on a team

Another characteristic that makes CrossFit different from other exercise programs is the sense of community people doing the workouts together feel.

“When you walk into a CrossFit gym, everyone knows each other,” says Letchford. “It’s not like a regular gym where you put

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your headphones on, hit the elliptical machine, and go into your own world. When people are working out together and they know what the other person is in the middle of experiencing, or just experienced, that builds community, and you end up in the same mindset.”

And you don't have to actually join a CrossFit gym to be a part of that community. The company makes its workouts available online for anyone to use and benefit from. Through detailed instructional videos, anyone can learn how to do CrossFit and scale it to their needs.

Disclaimer: It's important to first talk to your health care provider before beginning a new exercise routine.

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