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How to get into CrossFit exercise safely as a beginner

CrossFit gyms, also known as 'boxes' to fans, are popping up all over the UK and elsewhere in the world. The fitness regime promises to make people fitter and stronger via challenging workouts and is renowned for being intense. But what exactly is CrossFit – and is it suitable for beginners?

What is CrossFit?

CrossFit is a strength and conditioning workout that is made up of different [exercises](#) and movements performed in rapid, successive repetition. It takes elements from different forms of exercise, including [high-intensity interval training](#), weightlifting, gymnastics and more.

Many CrossFit workouts feature squats, dips, push-ups and weight-lifting exercises that build muscles. However, the classes involve a wide variety of [cardiovascular exercises](#) too, such as running and burpees.

"CrossFit is a strength and conditioning training methodology that uses constantly varied functional movements at relative intensity," says Jenny McNamara, a fitness instructor and coach at [CrossFit Cheddar Rising](#). "It takes aspects of many fitness disciplines and uses weights, Olympic lifting, gymnastics, running, rowing, bikes and more to keep workouts fun, challenging and progressive.

"It is different from other types of exercise because it develops all aspects of fitness in a fun, friendly and supportive environment. The CrossFit community is renowned for its friendliness and support of each other, with all athletes being cheered on to finish workouts by participants regardless of age, size and ability."

Like other [exercise](#) classes, CrossFit workouts are often performed in a group environment. However, the workouts can vary depending on the gym or instructor – and not all CrossFit classes look the same.

"CrossFit is different to other types of exercise because it trains the whole body as opposed to focusing on separate body parts," says Alexis Rufus, a fitness trainer and operations manager at the [CrossFit gym District Battersea](#). "The workouts change every day, making it interesting and fresh for people. All the classes are coach-led, so even though you train in a group environment you will receive individual coaching."

Is CrossFit good for you?

CrossFit workouts often include exercises that mimic movements you do in everyday life. These functional [movements](#), such as squats, kettle-bell swings, or overhead presses, can help improve agility, balance and flexibility. [Research](#) has also shown that CrossFit training can boost endurance, physical fitness and strength, while having a positive influence on body composition. In turn, this can boost self-esteem and well-being.

"There are many benefits to CrossFit which include improved mobility, better [joint health](#), improved [strength](#) and overall fitness," says Rufus. "It is also a great way to get all you need out of a training session in a 60-minute, coach-led class. You will be training alongside others which can help boost morale and overall confidence in the individual."

Is CrossFit suitable for beginners?

As the different [exercises](#) and movements can be modified to suit ability, the CrossFit workouts can be suitable for lots of people.

"It is suitable for everyone as every movement can be scaled to an appropriate level for the participant and their experience," says McNamara. "Qualified coaches will help athletes choose appropriate weights or movement variations to develop fitness before the athlete progresses."

As with any high-intensity workout, though, there is some risk involved. One [study](#) found that 20% of the CrossFit participants surveyed [injured](#) themselves while doing CrossFit-endorsed [workouts](#). The most commonly injured areas included the shoulders, knees and lower back, the research found. However, the involvement of trainers in helping to coach participants on their form was found to help decrease injuries.

"CrossFit can be risky for a beginner because the emphasis is to push yourself as hard as you can," says Leeds-based personal trainer and fitness instructor Peter Hopson. "If you're not experienced enough to know when your form is deteriorating, this can lead to you pushing too hard and injuring yourself.

"I would say ideally you should have a good base of cardiovascular [fitness](#) already and be proficient at all the basic compound moves. For example, squats, deadlifts and bent-over rows. However there are personal trainers at CrossFit gyms who can help beginners with their technique. Going straight into a class without experience is not an option."

How can you start CrossFit?

"To get into CrossFit as a beginner, look up your local CrossFit gym in the CrossFit directory or via a Google search," says McNamara. "They should offer an 'on ramp' or foundations course to teach you the basic lifts and movements safely and assess your movement, so that when you join classes they can make sure all exercises and weights are scaled to suit your [fitness](#) levels and ability."

Start with a trial session

Although CrossFit might be popular, the classes aren't for everyone. Therefore, an introductory or trial session can help you decide if it is for you.

"These are usually offered at most CrossFit gyms and are designed for beginners who might not have had any exposure to a barbell or the more technical movements you might see in CrossFit. This allows the person to get a feel for how we coach or modify movements for people," says Rufus.

Don't copy those around you

Although you may feel lost when starting a new [fitness class](#), it's important to focus on what the instructor is telling you, and not what others around you are doing. It's also important to commit to learning the correct form of an [exercise](#) to avoid hurting yourself, for example, when using weights.

"When you take part in classes, don't try to copy what those around you are doing, as those athletes may have been training for years to comfortably lift those weights or do advanced movements like muscle-ups and handstand push-ups," says McNamara. "Know that by starting sensibly, you will soon see enormous gains in your [fitness](#) and ability."

Don't be afraid to ask questions

"When joining in group classes I always advise people to ask questions if they are unsure - no question is an unnecessary one," says Rufus. "It can feel intimidating when you take part in your first CrossFit class, but the camaraderie and community that CrossFit has will always outshine any [fears](#) or nerves you may have."

Ease yourself into CrossFit classes

It can be tempting to go into a fitness regime with all guns blazing, but it's important to take things slowly to avoid [injury](#). Finding the right gym and class for you will help too. "All CrossFit gyms have a different approach, style of coaching and atmosphere so it's important to find one that best suits you. Try a few out before making your mind up," adds Rufus.

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