



news

Why CrossFit workouts may be injury prone for some

Sports doctor checks out CrossFit injury trends

The CrossFit workout trend of heavy weightlifting and short but intense intervals of cardio can be difficult for rookies lacking proper form or who are overly competitive, a sports medicine doctor and coach say.

The strength and conditional program is used by elite and everyday athletes. Proper training is key to reduce the risk of injury for workouts that combine high intensity cardio, weightlifting and gymnastics routines that change daily, with exercises from the Olympics and military boot camp.

Moves include a gymnastic pullup where the body swings up onto an overhead bar or bringing the toes up to a bar in a dynamic fashion.

When considering injuries, there's an important distinction between CrossFit the fitness program that caters to everyone and Crossfit the competitive sport, said Nic Martin, head coach at a Reebok CrossFit in Toronto.

"Often times people who you know are just looking for that general fitness are getting injured because they're doing things their bodies aren't ready for," Martin said.

Dr. Raza Awan, medical director at Synergy Sports Medicine & Rehabilitation in Toronto, enrolled in a month-long CrossFit program after noticing patients were coming in with injuries after participating. Awan said he got "amazing results," a sense of the demands of the exercises and how they could lead to injury.

The most common CrossFit injuries Awan sees in his clinic are:

- Lumbar disc injuries to the back from doing heavy squats or heavy deadlifts.
- Shoulder and rotator cuff injuries from push-ups or other overhead activities.
- Knee injuries from a lot of skipping, box jumps, heavy squats and lunges.

"Unless someone has a background in athletics or weightlifting, they may not know how to do some of the moves," Awan cautioned. "I think if people exercise with good form and technique, a lot of the exercises are very sound exercises."

Squats, lunges, pushups and pullups are all functional activities the people need to do in everyday life, he said.

"It's just that when you add in the competitive environment and the fact that there's a time pressure to get done, a lot of people will lose their form and technique and become sloppy."

Heather Kidd used to play lacrosse and was a varsity athlete. Kidd started doing CrossFit last November. After doing overhead lifts, she noticed a pinching pain in the shoulder that didn't go away.

"When you add in the competitive environment and the fact that there's a time pressure to get done, a lot of people will lose their form and technique and become sloppy." - Dr. Raza Awan

"It was supported where I was at to continue to go and be active but not necessarily doing something that was going to affect that problem area," Kidd said of her post-recovery workouts. "I've sort of retired from the 'win at all costs' attitude."

Dr. Mark Linder is a family doctor and emergency physician who has been doing CrossFit since November. Linder used to go to the gym to work on biceps and triceps. He likes that CrossFit uses the whole body because he wants to prevent injury when playing sports.

"There's no push to kill yourself. In fact, there's a great deal of encouragement to pace yourself," Linder said.

Trainers teach newcomers proper technique at foundations programs, offer dynamic warm ups and check members' technique, Martin said. The athletes also need to be proactive about avoiding injury by coming in early or staying later to work on mobility if they have a particular issue, he added.

"I think we need to realize there's injuries in any sport," Martin said. "There's injuries in any physical activity but it's really important to make sure that you're taking the [preventive] steps as an athlete."