
THE CrossFit LIFE

Breaking the Cycle: A Year Later

Lauren Lesinski's weight-loss story was one of the *CrossFit Journal's* most recommended stories in 2011. We caught up with Lesinski to find out how she's doing one year later.

By Hilary Achauer

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In December 2011, I wrote an article for the *CrossFit Journal* about Lauren Lesinski's 75-lb. weight loss called *Breaking the Cycle*. Inspired by Lesinski's story and the accompany photo of her in a bikini, more than 850 people recommended the article on Facebook.

The same month the article about Lesinski appeared in the *Journal*, *The New York Times* published an article called *The Fat Trap*, about how significant weight loss impacts the body's brain, muscles and metabolism, making it extremely difficult to keep the weight off. According to this article, if someone has been overweight for years or gone up and down in weight for most of his or her life, the body enters a unique metabolic state that biologically sabotages efforts to keep the weight off.

Researchers found that if someone has been overweight for much of his or her life, "to lose weight and keep it off, a person must eat fewer calories and exercise far more than a person who maintains the same weight naturally."

What about when you throw CrossFit in the mix? I was curious where Lesinski stood a year later after dropping 75 lb. Was she able to keep the weight off and maintain her healthy eating habits and workout routine?

Shifting Goals

"Winning the (weight loss) challenge in the gym and (seeing) the article in the *CrossFit Journal* was the tip-top pinnacle of my fitness goals," Lesinski said in October 2012, about a year after her article appeared in the *Journal*.

The period from October 2011 to March 2012 "were five months of awesomeness," Lesinski said.

However, she did encounter some unexpected problems after reaching her goal.

"It wasn't all positive. I thought, 'Now what? Is this as great as I can be?' At 34, I was in the best shape of my life," Lesinski said. She just wasn't sure what to do next, and she also found she wasn't entirely thrilled with the low number on the scale.

"I got to the point where I was too thin. My face looked old," she said. Lesinski found that what she thought was the magical weight of 155 lb. was not so magical for her. Lesinski achieved her weight-loss goal and instead of feeling satisfied, she said she felt almost disappointed.

"This is it," she thought. "I can't be any better than this."

However, Lesinski still had many CrossFit goals to accomplish.

"I used to think the only goal that mattered was on the scale," she said. "What I love about CrossFit is that you will never master it. Even Annie Thorisdottir and Rich Froning can lift more weight," Lesinski said.

So Lesinski made some new goals that had nothing to do with her weight. She started working on achieving 100 unbroken double-unders and a muscle-up and began the New Year with renewed focus and optimism.

The Accident

Then, on March 4, 2012, everything changed. Lesinski was riding in the back seat of her sister's car with her mother in the passenger seat. A driver cut them off, and their car smashed through the barrier into oncoming traffic.

Lesinski suffered a C2 vertebrae fracture, two black eyes and a gash in her head that required seven staples. Her sister broke her fingertip, and Lesinski's mom fractured



Nicole Megill

Lesinski competing in a CrossFit competition months before her devastating car accident.

some ribs. Everyone was lucky to be alive, but Lesinski couldn't stop thinking about how her injuries would prevent her from doing CrossFit.

After she got out of the hospital, Lesinski met with her doctor. She asked him when she could return to CrossFit.

"What's CrossFit?" the doctor asked.

After she explained, he said, "Well, you can't do push-ups or sit-ups or anything that requires you to hold your neck up."

Lesinski's heart sank.

"I wasn't able to do the thing that keeps me sane," Lesinski said.

She said this was terrifying for someone with a food addiction. Following her doctor's orders, Lesinski stayed away from the gym for two months.



Lauren Lesinski

After recovering from a car accident and a fractured vertebrae, Lesinski had to reevaluate her goals.

When she finally returned to CrossFit, Lesinski said, "It was a humbling experience. All my PRs went away. I used to be able to do five kipping pull-ups, and I couldn't even do one. I lost strength and I gained 10 lb. I had to keep telling myself, 'You are alive.'"

Lesinski spent the summer building up her strength. In September her doctor gave her the all clear, and in October Lesinski competed in a CrossFit competition in Orlando. She had to scale some of the movements, but Lesinski felt grateful.

"I am blessed to be well enough to compete," she said. "I feel like I won first place. Just showing up was an incredible milestone for me."

This year has been one of growth for Lesinski.

"I used to judge my worth solely by the number on the scale," she said.

When I first got in touch with her to do a follow-up story, Lesinski said she struggled with feeling like a failure because she did not keep every pound off. The accident, though a setback, gave her some perspective.

"I realize that I am not (a failure)," she said. "I get back up each day, and after every failure, and I keep going. I try to learn from my mistakes so that I can get better the next time, make the next right decision. I am not 155 lb. anymore, but that doesn't mean that this last year was a failure. I learned that 165 to 175 lb. is the 'happy weight range,' the range of weight that I can look at my naked body in the mirror with admiration and respect and not disgust."

Community is Key

Lesinski's success and the accompanying *CrossFit Journal* article had another unexpected side effect. Her affiliate, CrossFit ATP, hired Lesinski to write their newsletter, and she's become an important part of the gym.



Lauren Lesinski

Supported and encouraged by her CrossFit community, Lesinski has maintained her healthy habits a year after her initial weight loss.

"People look to me for motivation," she said. "That has helped me maintain my weight. I hold myself accountable."

The sense of community and positive peer pressure that happens inside a CrossFit gym is at the heart of CrossFit's success in helping people keep the weight off.

"We live in an environment with food cues all the time," Rena Wing said in "The Fat Trap." Wing helped create the National Weight Control Registry, which tracks 10,000 people who have lost weight and kept it off. Wing said that a person's environment has as much an impact as physiology when it comes to maintaining weight loss.

"We've taught ourselves over the years that one of the ways to reward yourself is with food. It's hard to change the environment and the behavior," Wing said.

The community aspect of CrossFit is extremely effective at creating a healthy environment. If Lesinski went to a Globo Gym where she didn't know a soul, she might be tempted to miss a workout, eat poorly or slack off. Instead, every time she goes to CrossFit, Lesinski sees friends who motivate her and keep her honest. And she's got over 850 Facebook recommendations as further inspiration.

The New York Times article presents a stark picture of how difficult it is to maintain significant weight loss. According to research, the body appears to fight weight loss by burning fewer calories and altering the brain's response to food. Losing weight is not the end of the journey but the beginning of a lifelong battle.

By shifting the emphasis from the number on the scale to the numbers on the whiteboard—by focusing on performance—and by providing a supportive community and healthy environment, CrossFit can help fight that battle and win.

