
THE CrossFit LIFE

Loading Dock CrossFit

Jenna Johnson doesn't have a CrossFit box near her home in Racine, Wisc., so she set up a gym next to the loading dock at work. Her co-workers think she's crazy, but she's never felt better. Hilary Achauer reports.

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Jenna Johnson works in a company with more than 500 employees, but pretty much everyone knows who she is. That's because every day at lunchtime, 26-year-old Johnson goes outside to a space next to the loading dock and does a CrossFit workout. (In the winter she works out in a large back room.) She's gathered a good-sized collection of toys, including kettlebells, medicine balls, a jump rope, an Atlas stone and an 85-lb. tire with a rope attached.

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"No one in my building does what I do," Johnson said, "but when you have nothing, you have to do whatever you can to make it happen. Co-workers have always been fascinated from day one, and they look at me as a motivator to get themselves to be more active and persistent," she said.

Time for a Change

In March 2011, Johnson had reached a point where she was unhealthy and unhappy with her weight. She weighed 170 lb. and never found time to work out because she spent so much time traveling for work. When she wasn't traveling, she was at her desk, working as an IT business analyst for a construction company in Wisconsin.

"I was constantly on the road, and I made poor decisions while eating out and overindulged in everything. I never had the time to work out, or I guess I made that choice and never made the time. The only physical activity I ever did was the elliptical or treadmill. I never thought about lifting weights," Johnson said.

Johnson travels to Lancaster, Pa., one week out of every month for work. On one of her trips, she noticed that her colleague, Sandi Lemishko, had lost weight and looked healthier. Lemishko told Johnson about Mike Kizis, who had come to their office to talk to the group about CrossFit and the Paleo Diet. Lemishko had followed his suggestions with impressive results, and Johnson was curious to find out more. Johnson reached out to Kizis, and on one of her visits to Pa., he encouraged her to try CrossFit.

On March 22, 2011, Johnson did a baseline workout at CrossFit Collective in Lancaster, Pa. It was so hard she almost didn't return.

"After my first workout I wanted to quit. I didn't think CrossFit was for me because I was never athletic in my previous years," Johnson said.

"Mike encouraged me to attend class the next day so I could meet the owner, who would be able to scale down the workouts and work with me to become a CrossFitter," Johnson said.

Johnson went back the next day, and Jeremiah Williams, one of the owners of CrossFit Collective, adjusted the workout so she didn't feel so overwhelmed.



Before (left) and after a year and a half of CrossFit (right).



Once Johnson discovered CrossFit, she found ways to fit exercise into her busy day.

"Before I knew it, I was addicted to CrossFit and intrigued because I wanted to learn more and get as strong as my fellow CrossFit friends I met," Johnson said.

Back Home

When she got back home to Racine, Wisc., Johnson found there wasn't a box near her.

One week of every month "I train at CF Collective, and I take home a list of key takeaways and things to work on and improve for doing CrossFit on my own," Johnson said.

Johnson started buying equipment little by little, and before she knew it she had a little mini gym in her office.



Johnson didn't let the lack of a nearby CrossFit box get in the way of her goals.

"It's a bit difficult to get a barbell and weights in the office, but it's amazing what little things you need to do a CrossFit WOD. Today, I live my life by no excuses and set one hour aside every day in my calendar just to CrossFit during my lunch hour," Johnson said.

Johnson is so committed that when she strained a tendon in her left ankle and had to wear a boot and use crutches for two months, she didn't stop exercising.

"I did one-legged workouts and (worked on) upper-body strength and kept pushing through despite being injured," she said.

Johnson said she has introduced a number of co-workers to the basics of CrossFit and nutrition. One of her co-workers lost 50 lb. after following Johnson's suggestions.

"Within the last year and five months, I've hit amazing PRs despite training on my own. I've learned so much from the CrossFit main page and essentially learned things on my own. I can proudly say that I not only know the CrossFit lingo but I know the functional movements. I've progressed tremendously in them and hope to obtain my Level 1 (certificate)."

Healthier and Stronger

Johnson has lost weight and no longer suffers from carpal tunnel syndrome. She had struggled with high cholesterol for three years, and within six months of starting a Paleo diet, her cholesterol lowered to a notch above borderline high.

In her first week of CrossFit, Johnson did Angie: 100 pull-ups, 100 push-ups, 100 sit-ups and 100 squats. She scaled it and finished in 56:47.

"It was a huge accomplishment for me and (I) was so stoked that I finished the WOD even though it took me almost an hour to complete!" Johnson said.

On August 21, 2012, Johnson did Angie again. This time she did it RX'd and finished in 20:55. Johnson's starting deadlift was 50 lb. in April 2011, and now she can deadlift 195 lb. Her push press went from 35 lb. to 95 lb., and she can now back-squat 160 lb. and front-squat 122 lb.

"CrossFit changed my life for the better," Johnson said. "I'm healthier and stronger than I ever was. I am blessed for the sport of elite fitness and look forward to my journey onwards.

"Oh, and as for my co-workers, they think I'm crazy! But they see my determination and motivation and are amazed with how strong-willed I've been."

