
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Look, Ma: No Bands!

Through her RX Girls: Miami blog, Monik Lopez-Calleja is starting a global community of strong women who believe in themselves.

By Monik Lopez-Calleja

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All images courtesy of Monik Lopez-Calleja

"I have an idea that the phrase "weaker sex" was coined by some woman to disarm some man she was preparing to overwhelm."— Ogden Nash

I was never really the fitness or sports type. That sounds weird coming from me now, because these days my life revolves around my fitness and nutrition.

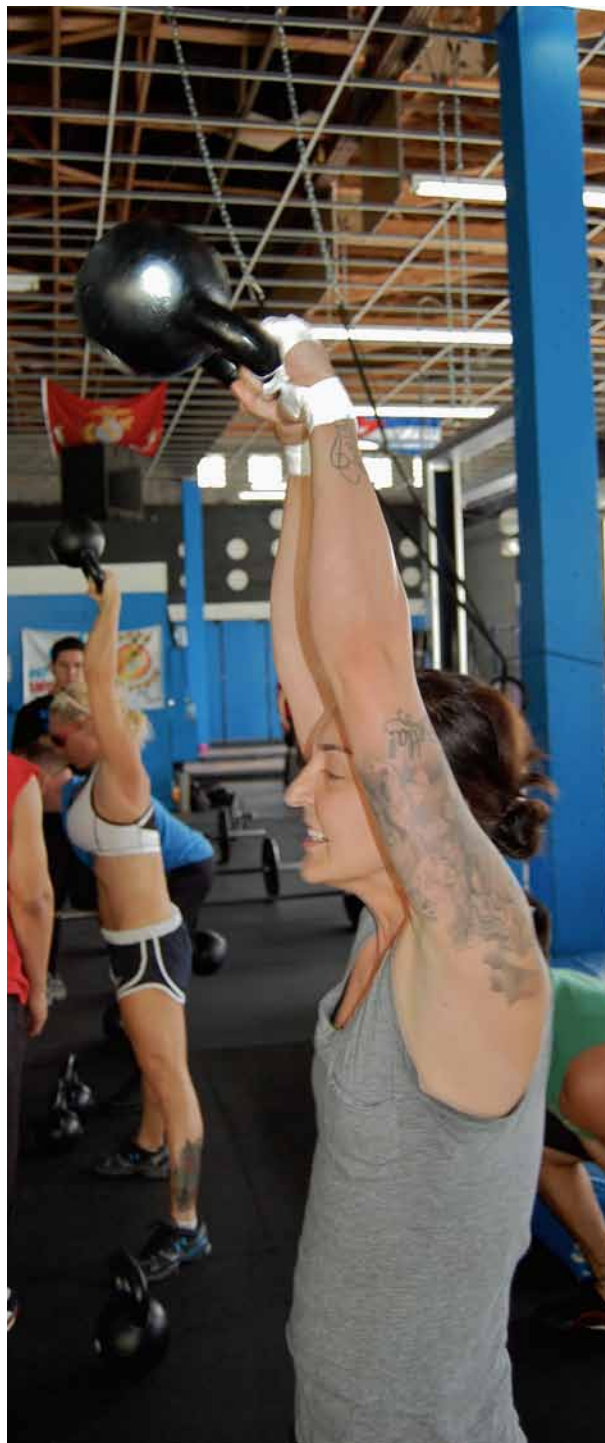
Hooked on Fitness

Right around the time of my wedding almost three years ago, I decided to get more involved in fitness and started working out at the gym. It was always either spin class, yoga or the group weightlifting class. I remember the weight class always seemed hard for me, and my max after about four months was a “heavy” 20 lb. I didn’t lift more because I didn’t think I could, and I also thought I would get hurt if I even tried. I guess in my mind, I wasn’t strong enough.

My husband started mentioning this thing called “CrossFit” that he had heard about, and I had absolutely no interest in doing it because things like that were “way too hard.” Anyway, I was comfortable doing my little routine. It was hard sometimes, but not too hard, and it made me feel like I was at least doing *something*. In hindsight, I shouldn’t have been too surprised when I fell in love with CrossFit, because I always preferred the weightlifting classes to the machines, and I would rather be outdoors on a bike than on a treadmill.

The first time I stepped foot into a CrossFit box was for the grand opening of CrossFit Kingdom. I remember a friend of my husband and I had written my name on the whiteboard to participate in the workout, and even though I was intimidated as hell I decided to give it a try. The workout was something like wall-balls, box jumps and burpees for four rounds. I could barely finish Round 1.

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Monik Lopez-Calleja didn't think she'd stick with CrossFit but now finds herself training others at CrossFit Kingdom in Florida.

That workout killed me, but it also did something else: it showed me that I could have fun working out. The friend of ours who had invited us there had been doing CrossFit for a few months, and she kicked ass through that workout. I remember thinking that if she could do it, I could too. My husband and I signed up that day and committed to three months, although I remember telling the owner, "I'm not really the motivated type, so we'll see. I'll do my best."

Burpees and Blogs

Those first two weeks were some of the most challenging workouts of my life. I was learning about things I had never seen before, and my body was the most sore it had ever been. In a very short time I began to feel a change in myself. I was completing workouts that before might have seemed impossible. I was working out with guys, and they were struggling as much as I was, but I was finishing and some of them weren't. I was watching other people do things that I wanted to do ... I was hooked.

Every day after I came home, I would post on Facebook what I had just done. When I hit a PR, I wrote about it. When I got my first pull-up, I wrote about it. When I first lifted my own body weight, I wrote about it. Those were some of my proudest moments, because I felt strong physically and mentally—and man was I proud.

I would also spend a lot of time on different CrossFit blogs reading motivating stories about how people's lives had changed because of the program. I felt more motivated than I had ever been, and I wanted to see if other people were as stoked about this as I was. What I found out is there are *tons* of people out there who felt the same way. CrossFit has a way of changing the way you feel that is different than any other form of fitness I've done before. I've grown to love and appreciate the program more and more since I started, and I've enjoyed gains that are greater than I could have ever imagined. I started talking more to the girls at CrossFit Kingdom and sharing stories with them. That's when I decided to start my own blog, [RX Girls: Miami](#).



Strong women who can lift weights, too.



The blog started off as a way for me to share articles I had read about women in the CrossFit community. Some of the first things I wrote about were issues I had dealt with myself, like trying to learn the kipping pull-up or dealing with the calluses that were forming on my hands. The guys liked having those “battle wounds,” but me? I can’t exactly go to work looking like I stuck my hand in a blender. Even though I have embraced these things about CrossFit now, I had no clue about what to do back then. So I took to the Internet for help, and then I shared what I found with the girls at my box.

Being in the field of mental health, I also became very aware of the improvements in my body image and self-esteem that I got through doing this program. I remember one of the first things I learned in here is that you have to feed your body to perform, not to lose weight. Even though most of us came into this program wanting that physical change in ourselves, you realize that just by being here and giving your all, your mind changes too. Soon you start trying to improve your previous records or wanting to improve your form on a technical lift, and before you know it, the body has followed the mind. It improved. None of that can happen unless you have a good foundation for improvement, and that starts with what you eat, what your habits are, and how willing you are to work toward reaching your goals.

I started taking more time to write about these things on the blog and put a lot of thought into the posts I made. Little by little, I began to get feedback from the girls at our box. Someone would come in and tell me they practiced a visualization technique I posted, or another girl would tell me that she loved the recipe I put up. I remember one day I wrote about being confident in yourself and doing the things in life that make you happy, and later that night one of the girls told me it was exactly what she needed to read that day.

As the months passed, I started getting more feedback from women not only at my box and in the South Florida area, but also from women around the United States. It’s funny how when you put your heart and soul into something, people start to notice and connect with you. The more I opened up about my own thoughts and experiences, the more I heard from people.

Inspiring Other Women

It’s not uncommon for women to start CrossFit a little bit skeptical of the program. After all, CrossFit is often promoted as a sport, and for the most part, sports have always been seen as male dominated. In our culture, the thin feminine ideal that most women grow up striving for completely clashes with an athletic female body type. One of the most common concerns I’ve heard from new women coming in is that they don’t want to “get big,” and they want to make sure they work on their abs. A valid concern, I guess, but it sounds so funny to me now.

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***Female CrossFitters have unique concerns, and RX Girls:
Miami is a place for women to share their stories and learn from other women.***

Lots of women are misinformed about what their body is capable of in terms of size and how their muscles work. Women in general don't usually do a lot of heavy lifting, and when you see images of weightlifters in magazines with huge muscles and tons of veins, there usually isn't a disclaimer saying those results are unnatural. After talking a bit with these concerned women, I usually tell them a little about my blog and the stuff I write about on there. Knowing that these concerns are common usually makes people feel better about the program and what it can do for them.

I've noticed that, as women, our self-concept manifests in different ways. Lots of women are very confident in some areas of their lives, but in others they may feel that they are not good enough. Most of us want to keep this image of femininity, at the same time wanting to feel secure, beautiful and empowered. It's a constant struggle that's always in our minds whether we like it or not.

It's pretty common for women to tie their self-esteem and self-worth to the way they look, and that's really not what it's about. Self-esteem and self-worth come from doing things that make you feel good and from overcoming hardships, meeting goals and conquering challenges in life. CrossFit provides all of that and more, but it takes an open mind and maybe even a little push to get comfortable in that place. You have to be willing

to look at yourself and you have to be ready to commit, because without commitment to the program you can't get the benefits. What is unfortunate is that the women who have not yet found this program or those who are afraid to start for whatever reason are missing out on the opportunity to gain competence, assertiveness, strength and empowerment. That fact alone is why I try to promote my blog to as many women as possible.

Helping Others See Their Potential

One of the things I love doing is highlighting the women from our box when we do "Athlete of the Month." I also write for our main site, so each month the other coaches and I pick someone we feel has truly committed to the program. The messages that come from the women are always about developing strength, overcoming fears and weaknesses, and feeling better than they have ever felt. That's what it's all about: not only feeling good physically but also feeling good mentally. Highlighting these awesome girls has allowed for me to share the fact that anyone can do this. CrossFit is not just for super-athletic people who have always been fit. CrossFit women are secretaries, nurses, housewives, accountants, students, mothers and teachers, and they are sharing stories about how they could once barely lift a 15-lb. bar but can now lift their own weight. They are talking about meeting goals they never thought they would reach.

One thing I haven't really mentioned is how I found a deeper passion in CrossFit. It might be obvious because of all that I've written, but I really enjoy helping other people. It's what I have chosen to do with my professional career, and CrossFit has blended well with that. Since starting, I was asked by the owner of my box to become the head women's coach. I love to be able to watch a new member transform into the strong, beautiful woman she didn't know was there. I even started printing shirts especially for the women at my box. They feature inspiring quotes the women can show off and be proud of. Those shirts have become a little more of a success than I thought, and I've been shipping them around the United States, too.

CrossFit and the RX Girls blog have done so much for me personally, and I couldn't be more grateful. For one, it makes me so much more self-aware. When I write about things I want the girls to do, there's no way I can't follow my own advice.

I know the women we work with are strong and capable, and I know they can succeed, even if they don't know it themselves.

How am I going to tell someone to challenge herself if I am unwilling to do the same thing? I *know* how easy it is to want to quit, and I also *know* how hard it is to fight that. How can I suggest eating clean if I plan to eat crap? One of the things I love doing is creating new recipes I can share so that transitioning to a healthier diet is still enjoyable. And how would I know you can push through something if I have never done it?

I know the women we work with are strong and capable, and I know they can succeed, even if they don't know it themselves.



"There are so many people out there that will tell you that you can't. What you've got to do is turn around and say, 'Watch me.'" — Unknown



About the Author

After working part-time at CrossFit Kingdom of Miami, Monik and her husband recently opened CrossFit Soul, where they hope to combine her passion for mental health, physical health and fitness.