
THE CrossFit LIFE

Road Test: Headbands

Hilary Achauer was tired of headbands that came off in the middle of a WOD, so she went in search of the perfect headband for CrossFit.

By Hilary Achauer

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Allison Achauer

This Lululemon headband got tossed mid-WOD after loosening during double-unders.

“Often it isn’t the mountains ahead that wear you out, it’s the little pebble in your shoe.” —Muhammad Ali

I was in the middle of a surprisingly brutal 20-minute AMRAP of 4 thrusters (135/95 lb.), 8 toes-to-bars, 12 pistols and 16 double-unders. In the third round, right in the middle of the thrusters, I felt my headband slip back on my head.

By the time I got to the double-unders, the headband had slipped back so far it was about to completely slide off. After I finished the double-unders, I reached up and tore it off in frustration and threw it to the ground. In addition to battling fatigue, I spent the rest of the workout fighting my hair: it was flopping in my face, getting in my mouth and generally making a miserable experience even worse.

The discarded headband was not the cheap drugstore variety. It was a \$12 headband from Lululemon—a brand that had never failed me before. The headband is lined with silicone, which is supposed to prevent slippage, but it is also adjustable, and that made it slowly slide open as the workout progressed.

In CrossFit, we’re all about performance, and it’s hard to chase a PR while choking on your hair. CrossFit workouts are hard enough without additional problems.

After that disastrous workout I made a decision: I would try as many headbands as I could to find the ideal intersection of function, form and price and discover the perfect headband for CrossFit.

The Rules

I had a few important criteria for judging my headbands:

1. Performance during the WOD. Did it stay put during a variety of movements? Did the headband offer any additional benefits, like keeping the sweat out of my eyes?
2. Comfort. I don't want my headband sliding off during a workout, but it's a failure if the thing squeezes my head so hard I get a headache.
3. Appearance. Let's be real: nobody wants to look weird.

To be truly scientific, I would have had to perform the exact same workouts in each different headband (and in the exact same weather), but because CrossFit is about constantly varied functional movements, I wasn't interested in doing the same workout over and over again. Most CrossFit workouts involve a lot of sweating and movement, so I decided to continue following the programming at my home gym, CrossFit Pacific Beach, and rotate in various headbands, taking note of their performance.



Courtesy of Hilary Achauer

Verdict: Too big and too hot.

The Test

1. Scunci Effortless Beauty Cotton Headbands

Price: I paid \$7.97 for a pack of five at my local drugstore, but they are available online for less.

WOD: I started off with 3 x 3 back squats, followed by a met-con of 3 rounds of 10 squat snatches (95 lb.) and 10 bar-facing burpees.

I've previously stayed away from thick headbands because I think they look weird on me. They look cute on other people, but I always think I look a little flat-headed when I wear a thick headband. This one was no exception. However, in the interest of research, I slid it on my head and started with the back squats. Although it was the middle of October, San Diego was experiencing record temperatures near 90 degrees, and I was working out at noon in a non-insulated warehouse space. It got hot quickly, and my head immediately started to feel itchy.

I finished the squats and moved on to the met-con, and the headband stayed put through every agonizing squat snatch and painful burpee. By the end of this workout that took me way too long—a little over 17 minutes—my head was burning up. I ripped it off for the last few minutes just to let my head breathe.

The benefit of this headband is that it will not move, and the price is right. However, if, like me, you have a low tolerance for a hot, sweaty forehead, or if you don't like the look of thick headbands, these are not for you.

2. Junk Brands – High Performance X-Treme Athletic Headband

Price: \$16.00 for one

WOD: The workout started off with squat-snatch work: 65 percent x 2, 70 percent x 2, 75 percent x 1. Then I worked to a heavy set of 2 overhead squats. The met-con was 6 rounds of 12 kettlebell swings (53 lb.) and 6 burpees over the kettlebell.



Courtesy of Hilary Achauer

The author remains unconvinced that thick headbands look good.

I first heard about Junk Brands, a relatively new company, when my friend wore a neon yellow Junk Brands headband to the gym. She told me she purchased it at the CrossFit Games. I was intrigued, because unlike most headbands, this one ties in the back, which makes it infinitely adjustable—you can make it as tight or as loose as you want. The headbands are supposed to be worn lower on the forehead, and the model I tried, called the High Performance X-Treme Athletic Headband, is made of a quick-drying, moisture-wicking microfiber. The headbands are available in a variety of different patterns, colors and widths. They are the most expensive of the headbands I tried—pricier even than Lululemon's.

The temperature was in the mid-80s again for this workout. I experimented with putting my ponytail a little higher, and I liked the way that looked better. Once I put this headband on, I never thought about it, until someone said, "Hey, I like your headband!"

I got a PR on my overhead squats, which I suppose can't be directly attributed to the headband, but PRs can sometimes be mysterious, so who can say?



Allison Achauer

The Sweaty Bands headband is favored by runners but got a thumbs down for CrossFit.

Then I moved on to the WOD. The combination of kettlebell swings and burpees on a hot day made me start sweating from the first round, but the headband kept the sweat out of my face and stayed put. It kept all the hair out of my face as well, and I didn't give one thought to the headband during the WOD, which left me free to focus on how terrible it felt to swing that 53-lb. kettlebell. My head did feel hot when the workout was over, so I ripped the headband off as soon as I caught my breath, but overall I was very pleased with this headband. It's a good choice if you have layered or shorter hair that requires a thicker headband to keep it all in place.

3. Sweaty Bands/Noodle Hugger

Price: \$5.00 for one via Noodle Hugger on [Etsy](#) or \$10-\$18 via Sweaty Bands

WOD: I started off with clean-and-jerk practice: 60 percent x 2, 65 percent x 2, and 70 percent x 1, then did 3 x 3 split jerks at 70 percent. The met-con was Grace: 30 reps of clean and jerk at 135/95 lb.



Courtesy of Hilary Achauer

The Under Armour headband was a little too tight but was the author's favorite of all the headbands she tested.

When I started this project, I put out a call on Facebook asking for headband recommendations. A friend who is a runner but not a CrossFitter stopped me as I was dropping off my daughter at school and said, "If you're looking for headbands, you have to check out Sweaty Bands. But look for them on Etsy—they're cheaper."

A quick Internet search revealed that Sweaty Bands (and their Etsy knock-offs) are ribbon headbands with elastic along the bottom for stretch. They are lined with velvet, which helps them stay put. Runners swear by these things. I purchased a red one with white stars, lined with purple velvet.

This is the first time I've been annoyed by a headband during the lifting portion of the workout. I could feel my hair swirling around my face as I worked through my clean and jerks. I found myself adjusting the headband in between reps to get a handle on my hair.

Grace is a quick-and-dirty workout. I was trying to beat my sub-3-minute time, but after going all out on Cindy the previous day, I was pretty fried and finished in 3:48. The headband stayed put during the workout, but I was aware of it on my head. Although the velvet makes the headband stay put, it also made my head feel hot and itchy. I like the

look of this headband and might repurpose it for everyday wear, but I mostly likely won't be wearing it to work out in again.

4. Under Armour: Braided Mini Headband

Price: \$9.99

WOD: Re-do of CrossFit Games Open Workout 12.2: AMRAP in 10 minutes of 30 snatches at 45 lb., 30 snatches at 75 lb., 30 snatches at 100 lb., and as many snatches as possible at 120 lb.

I bought this headband at the suggestion of my friend Lindsay, who trains and coaches at CrossFit PB. The only color available was "capri," a mix of yellow, pink and blue that looks a bit strange online but was surprisingly cute in person. Of all the headbands, I liked the look of this one the best. It's not too thin or too thick, and the fact that it's braided means there is absolutely no danger of the dreaded flat-head, because it sticks up a little from your head, like an actual braid. As with the Lululemon headband, this one is lined with a silicone strip on the inside. However, unlike the Lululemon headband, it is not adjustable. This meant the headband felt quite tight when I put it on, but it didn't bother me once I got it in place.



The Junk Brands headband ties in the back and was the most comfortable of the bunch.

The weather cooled down a bit, so keeping the sweat off my face was not as much an issue, but hair wrangling remained a priority. I was nervous to re-do Open Workout 12.2. I'm nowhere near a competitive CrossFit athlete, but I always get anxious when I'm trying to beat a certain time. I got 66 reps during the Open, and my snatch technique has improved since then, so I hoped to beat that score.

I did not give one thought to the headband during this workout. Which is good, because I was completely consumed by how terrible I felt by about the 50th snatch. The 100 lb. snatches felt much better than the last time I did them. I didn't fail any reps and ended up with a score of 69.

Because this is a thinner headband, I didn't feel like I needed to rip the headband off at the end of the workout like I did with some of the thicker headbands. It did start to feel a bit tight by the end of workout, so it's not something I would want to wear for hours on end.

The Verdict

All the headbands I tried stayed firmly in place throughout each workout, which was the most important point of performance. As far as comfort, the winner was the Junk Brands headband because I could adjust it to my preference, it kept the sweat out of my eyes, and it never felt itchy. However, it is expensive, and I'm not sold on the thick-headband look.

My overall favorite was the braided Under Armour headband. It stayed in place, kept my hair out of my place, and I love the way it looks.

Now it's your turn! What headbands did I miss? Which ones do you love—and why? Post replies to comments .

