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## Nine-Month WOD

Bayley Lawrence talks about her experience  
CrossFitting while pregnant.

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By Bayley Lawrence

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Pregnancy is a workout only CrossFit could design:

Start with an empty vest. For every week that goes by, add one-quarter to one pound to the vest. Continue adding weight for eight months. Do not stop the workout but modify if necessary. This is not for time. Going faster will get you nowhere.

3-2-1... Go!

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*After finding the CrossFit Mom site, Bayley Lawrence adapted her workouts to her pregnancy.*

### **Becoming a CrossFit Mom**

I am no CrossFit star. Far from it. Even before I got pregnant, I couldn't do more than two pull-ups in a row. Double-unders eluded me, as did handstand push-ups. I have never set foot in a CrossFit gym; I work out at gyms on military bases where my husband is stationed (they may not be perfect, but they're free). Though I eat a very clean diet, it's not Paleo or Zone; I eat intuitively and as healthfully as I can.

In July of 2011, I'd been doing CrossFit for just over a year. I was starting to really enjoy my noticeable new strength and speed when two lines showed up on the home pregnancy test.

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## **I was determined not to be relegated to the couch, which seemed to be the fate of too many pregnant women**

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I was determined not to be relegated to the couch, which seemed to be the fate of too many pregnant women—egged on by their own or their doctors' desires. While exercise was and is a priority in my life, it did not override my other goals. During the two months when my husband and I were trying to get pregnant, I made an effort to not overdo it at the gym. I still followed CrossFit main-site programming but kept myself away from extreme exertion by slowing everything down.

Once that test came up positive, though, it was time to really dial it down, and I had done my research. A simple Internet search brought me to the [CrossFit Mom](#) website, a thrilling discovery for any new, clueless pregnant woman. It's run by Andrea Nitz, a trainer out of CrossFit Brand X in Ramona, Calif., and it offers not only scaled versions of the main site WODs but also a community forum for pregnant and post-partum CrossFitters everywhere. It is a gold mine.

The CrossFit Mom WODs are divided into three categories: advanced, intermediate and beginner. Because I started out my pregnancy strong, healthy and accustomed to the rigors of a CrossFit workout cycle, I used the advanced version. I always felt safe and comfortable doing the exercises. Nitz recommends certain basic substitutions for exercises, so if it was a rest day and I wanted to work out, I could easily look on the CrossFit main site and scale a workout to pregnancy-style, swapping hang power cleans for cleans from the floor, knees to elbows for GHD sit-ups, or lighter one-armed kettlebell swings for heavier two-handed swings (CrossFit Mom advises against doing certain movements that put unnecessary strain on the belly).

Not wanting to risk anything in the delicate days of the first trimester, I started following the CrossFit Mom programming exclusively. The only exception was that I consistently ran more than prescribed. For example, I would often add an 800-meter run between rounds of a workout, and I tried to go for 20-to-30-minute jogs on one of the two consecutive rest days. I like running; I ran

cross-country through high school and moved on to half and full marathons after. I am not fast, and pregnancy slowed me down, but I was comfortable running straight through the nine months. Other than that, I followed the WODs to the letter.

I never lifted more than 65 lb., and the rare times I tried to go up to 70 or 75 lb. were uncomfortable. If I felt any awkward or pulling sensations in my belly, I immediately stopped, walked around the gym and came back to the workout slowly.

The whole experience was exceptional. I felt strong, even though I wasn't lifting heavy weights compared to what I lifted pre-pregnancy (which was not heavy by most standards). Despite eliminating or modifying many of the regular CrossFit exercises, I knew that working out was helping me maintain my strength, and that it was good for my baby, too. On days when the workout kicked my ass (and there were plenty of those), I told myself over and over that I would need the endurance during labor and post-partum recovery, and that the workouts would help my baby handle the rigors of labor better.

### First to Third

The most surprising aspect of pregnancy for me, and the most annoying, was the first-trimester exhaustion. I was shocked at how tired I got just rowing 500 meters some days. I felt pretty drained all the way through the first trimester until I hit 13 weeks. Still, I rarely missed a workout, even if that meant taking my sweet time and sitting on the floor or stretching for long minutes in between rounds. My stubbornness paid off: the workouts gave me more energy, and I usually felt better afterward.

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I admit there were a few days in the first trimester when I would sit on the C2 with the handle in my hands, or stand at the squat rack with the bar resting on my shoulders, telling myself over and over to go. Sometimes nothing would happen for a while. My body was telling me to take it relatively easy, and I listened. In pregnancy, unlike in normal life, it always pays to listen to your body's signals when it's telling you to slow the hell down.



*By listening to her body, Lawrence was able to keep working out throughout her pregnancy.*



***Moving lighter loads during pregnancy, Lawrence carefully monitored the intensity of each workout.***

At 13 weeks, as if by magic, the curtain of exhaustion lifted. The second trimester was great. I could run comfortably, and I suddenly had a lot more energy (I was also eating a lot more vegetables, which didn't hurt). I didn't gain a lot of weight, and I did not experience any of the discomforts I dreaded: back pain, strange food cravings, swelling, sleeplessness, constipation ... was that too much information? Clearly, working out, in combination with a clean diet and the fortune of a low-risk pregnancy, saved me from a lot of uncomfortable months.

Going into the third trimester, I was revved up. Around the end of the seventh month, my belly started to get in the way of certain exercises. I had to deliberately navigate the barbell around it, and my rowing form changed, but I kept at it. I started to get strange looks at the gym, but it helped my ego to finally look pregnant, so that when I had to take a break after every three overhead squats, people knew I was working out for two and not just resting a lot because I was lazy.





*Lawrence gained a total of 21 lb. during her pregnancy.*

My doctor never asked me about my exercise program or advised me about what to do or not to do. Frankly, this was probably for the better. I know what my body can handle better than he does, and I don't see any reason for him to offer me advice that I'm not going to follow. Even in the absence of medical advice, my blood work and blood pressure were always good, and my weight gain was healthy (I gained 21 lb. in total).

I worked out up until the very end of my pregnancy, and Owen Joseph Freeman was born on March 30 after 30 hours of the hardest work I could ever imagine. I went through it free of pain medication. My last workout was March 28. The next morning, I went into labor while I was getting changed for the gym. I labored at home (still in my sports bra) for 12 hours before going to the hospital and laboring for another 18 hours there before the little guy was born with the help of a vacuum extractor due to being face-up and completely stuck.

The doctor said that it was less than a 50 percent chance that we'd be able to get the baby out with the vacuum, and that I would need to push harder than I'd ever pushed before (this after three hours of intense pushing with no progress). The alternative was a C-section. I dug deep, and I pushed with all my heart, and we got him out. I narrowly avoided a C-section, and Owen was born with a sore head but was otherwise perfect at 6 lb. 15 oz. He made a lightning-fast recovery, and the nurses were all surprised that he had handled the long and hard labor so well.

I was able to have intermittent monitoring the entire time because of his ability to keep his heart rate relatively constant despite the stress of labor. For this I credit all the workouts we did together: he was used to me working hard, and he knew how to deal with it.

### **Back to the Gym**

Despite his challenging entrance into the world, Owen is absolutely the best thing we could imagine. I was back in my favorite jeans just three days later, which felt good, but not nearly as good as seeing my little guy so healthy and happy and peaceful. After 12 days of no exercise other than long walks, I ventured back to the gym and did Grace with a modest 55 lb.

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“Always, always, always  
finish the workout.”  
If I finished, I succeeded.**

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I continued to work out every other day or as my body wanted to, slowly upping the weights and intensity. It felt fantastic to push myself hard and not worry about getting my heart rate up too high or being out of breath. Finally, I had my own body back, with no one to share it with, and when I came home soaked in sweat and kissed my little boy, I felt like a billion dollars.

I'm lucky I started CrossFit before I got pregnant and was therefore comfortable easing into scaled-for-pregnancy WODs. I don't know how I would have gotten through the nine months if all I did at the gym was run on the treadmill or bounce on the elliptical. Sticking with the workouts required a complete mindset change: pre-pregnancy, a WOD was an opportunity to compete with myself and or my husband, whereas in pregnancy I never pushed myself harder than was necessary. My gym mantra was, "Always, always, always finish the workout." If I finished, I succeeded. It's the same with pregnancy: there are no rewards for doing it faster, and in fact being patient is the most valuable asset.

CrossFit taught me about patience in the midst of physical pain, and pregnancy and labor reinforced this lesson in a different but surprisingly symbiotic way. The two complement each other perfectly, and the result is healthy women and healthy babies. In many ways, that was more rewarding for me than a new PR or fitting back into my clothes.

Owen agrees: he's already doing body-weight squats with a little help from dad.



### About the Author

*Bayley Lawrence used to live in Monterey, Calif., but moved to Hangzhou, China, in the summer of 2011 with her husband and two-month-old son to study and travel for two years. They blog at [Nickandbayley.wordpress.com](http://Nickandbayley.wordpress.com), and Bayley can be reached at [bayleyrlawrence@gmail.com](mailto:bayleyrlawrence@gmail.com).*