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Giving Thanks for WODs

When it's time to stuff your face for Thanksgiving, affiliates have the antidote. Andréa Maria Cecil advises you to think of the holiday workout as "preventative maintenance."

By Andréa Maria Cecil

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All images: CrossFit New England

Nearly 391 years ago, the first Thanksgiving feast was documented in the U.S.: it was celebrated by pilgrims in modern-day Massachusetts after a plentiful harvest.

Today, the holiday has retained its integrity: it's a day of appreciation involving gluttony and ruthless consumerism.

1 of 4

Wait. What?

How Thanksgiving has changed.

But as CrossFitters, we have something more for which to be thankful: the WOD. This allows us to partake in the food orgy as we've preemptively burned the calories.

Right? Of course.

Biscuits and Peanut Butter

At CrossFit New England, the Thanksgiving workout for nearly four years has been Murph. The infamous Hero Workout involves running 1 mile before doing 100 pull-ups, 200 push-ups, 300 squats and then running another mile.

The long-standing instruction from CrossFit.com: "If you've got a twenty pound vest or body armor, wear it."

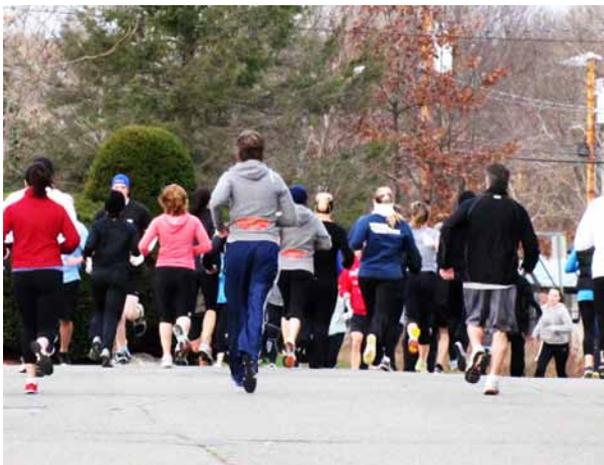
Ah, the joys of giving thanks.

"It's a big workout that people get really excited about," said Ben Bergeron, co-owner and head coach at CrossFit New England in Natick, Mass. "The bigger and nastier the workout, the more people show up for them."

Traditionally, more than 75 people participate in CFNE's Thanksgiving workout, he noted.

"It feels like they've done a lot before they gorge themselves at the Thanksgiving dinner table," Bergeron added. "We do a little talk about 'giving thanks' and recognizing what is important in life and then get after it. Sure beats a turkey trot."

Not so fast there, Ben.



Doing Murph on Thanksgiving automatically earns you a second piece of pie.

At CrossFit Redemption in Huntington Beach, Calif., the city's annual Turkey Trot is exactly what members are all about.

Last year—the year the affiliate opened—seven members ran the 5K/10K. This year, 18 members have signed up as of early November, said affiliate owner Gabe Baltodano.

"It feels like they've done a lot before they gorge themselves at the Thanksgiving dinner table."

**—Ben Bergeron,
CrossFit New England**

"The gym is not open on Thanksgiving and our only reasoning is that we want to pull all the members' focus on the 'outside the box' event," he explained.

Eat too much pecan pie, my friend, and you'll be outside the box all right.

"It's fun to get together and do things as a group and represent our brand of fitness," Baltodano added.

That's how Tim Steel sees it, too.

His affiliate—CrossFit Hershey in Annville, Pa.—has helped to host a 5K every year at Thanksgiving since it opened in 2010.

"It's pretty good exposure for the gym and a good number of us PR—due to CrossFit theory—each time we run," Steel said.

They PR on the run, of course, not on the amount of tryptophan you can ingest in one sitting, in case there's confusion. It is, after all, the Sticks and Biscuits 5K. Mmm, biscuits.

Not only does CrossFit Hershey help to raise money for Palmyra's ice-hockey program by assisting in the organization of Sticks and Biscuits, but it also uses the event as an opportunity to teach people about CrossFit.

"People can see that we're a bunch of normal Joes—not a bunch of Rich Froning and Matt Chan type of people," Steel said.

Um, Rich Froning eats peanut butter. Lots of it. And he probably eats it on Thanksgiving, too. I'll speak for everyone in the country when I say we all want to be Rich Froning and eat lots of peanut butter on Thanksgiving.

“I wanted to help people feel a little less guilty about all the shit they were going to be eating for the next few days.”

**—Tai Randall,
CrossFit Montgomery County**

“A lot of people don't know where we are. They think we're crazy people to do what we do,” Steel continued. “This shows them that we're normal people and we're involved in the community.”

I've been CrossFitting since 2008, Tim. We ain't normal, dude.

Worse Than Murph?

At CrossFit Montgomery County in Gaithersburg, Md., owner Tai Randall programmed a Thanksgiving workout in 2009—the first year the box was open—that might just be worse than Murph:

5 rounds of:

5 pull-ups

10 push-ups

15 squats

Then, 4 rounds of:

8 handstand push-ups

15 kettlebell swings

Then, 3 rounds of:

15 box jumps

15 knees-to-elbows

Then, 2 rounds of:

20 wall-balls

30 sit-ups

Then, 1 round of:

50 burpees

“I put this WOD together as a new affiliate hoping to involve some components of all the favorite benchmarks,” Randall explained. “Sort of a ‘CrossFit Sampler Platter,’ I suppose.”

A CrossFit Sampler Platter—on Thanksgiving. I just wanted to point that out.

“It was a way for us to remind ourselves how thankful we are for the GPP provided in the CrossFit program,” he continued. “That, and I wanted to help people feel a little less guilty about all the shit they were going to be eating for the next few days.”

And so the truth is revealed.

“Member reactions to this WOD are much the same as for many of the WODs I program: disbelief, resigned acceptance and an apparently overwhelming desire to ask me if that's really what the WOD is.”

Well, not for nothin', Tai, but I'd ask, too. How many rounds of what again?

At CrossFit Lancaster in Lancaster Township, Pa., Tim Card goes for a more morbid approach.

“We usually only do one WOD early in the day on Thanksgiving, and it's always the Deck of Death,” he said.

No, it's not Halloween. In his defense, if you dare step foot into Wal-Mart on Black Friday, you are tempting fate.



This isn't quite what the pilgrims had in mind.

The workout goes like this: each suit is a movement and the numbers are the reps. So kings are 10 deadlifts, aces are 10 burpees and jokers appropriately represent 50 double-unders. Work your way through the deck, card by card. The movements are “pretty simple,” Card added.

“There’s no, like, squat snatches or something like that or something really complicated that you wouldn’t pick up in your first beginner’s class,” he explains.

The workout takes about an hour and everybody finishes at the same time, Card said.

“We encourage everyone to bring friends and family. It has always been a great time, and this year there are people actually looking forward to it,” he said. “I wanted to do something different than what we normally do, where nobody got left behind and where we all kind of pulled together and did it.”

For him, it was about imparting the spirit of the season.

“Part of the idea of Thanksgiving is realizing that we’re all in this together,” Card explained. “It didn’t seem like Thanksgiving was about competition, in general, so I didn’t want to make the WOD about competition.”



Giving thanks for the end of Murph.

Ironic, given that the day following Thanksgiving is all about competition. What was that Facebook meme? Oh, right: “Because only in America people trample others for sales exactly one day after being thankful for what they already have.”

So, my friends, get ye to the box on Thanksgiving, and be thankful for the WOD.



About the Author

*Andréa Maria Cecil is the Regional Community Media Director for the Australia, Europe and North East regions. She was also the North East Regional Media Director for the 2012 Reebok CrossFit Games. Cecil has been a freelance writer and editor for the **CrossFit Journal** since 2010 and also writes for the CrossFit Games site. She spent nearly 13 years as a professional journalist, most recently as managing editor of the **Central Penn Business Journal** in Harrisburg, Pa. The 34-year-old is a native of New Orleans who lives in York County, Pa. There, she’s been doing CrossFit since 2008 at **CrossFit York**, where she coaches Olympic weightlifting as a USA Weightlifting Level 1 Sports Performance Coach. Additionally, Cecil dedicates four days a week to training the Olympic lifts herself at **McKenna’s Gym**.*