

---

# THE CrossFit JOURNAL

---

## CrossFitting Through Pregnancy

For pregnant CrossFitters, resources on how to continue hitting the WOD are becoming easier to find. CrossFit Chantilly owner Catherine Cochran, a Type 1 diabetic, shares her experience.

By Catherine Cochran

December 2012

---



Mary Miller

In 2009, as a Type 1 diabetic struggling with my condition and experiencing life-threatening hypoglycemic episodes, I did my first CrossFit workout: Fran.

It was heavily scaled, but I completed the workout and was immediately hooked. In the months to follow, I regained control over my blood sugar, my cholesterol levels and my life. It was invigorating and empowering, and I wrote about it in the *CrossFit Journal* article [No Limits](#). In May 2010, I found out I was pregnant.

---

1 of 5

I started searching for resources on working out while pregnant. At the time, there weren't many. I spoke to my doctor, who gave me guidelines on what I should and shouldn't do. As a Type 1 diabetic, my pregnancy was already considered high risk, and I had a team of doctors ready to make sure I delivered a healthy baby.

---

**I decided to employ  
the tactic of motivating  
other athletes to ensure  
I could talk—or yell—  
normally during a workout.**

---

Since giving birth to my healthy son in January 2011, more resources on working out—and specifically doing CrossFit—while pregnant have been published. Women and coaches who witnessed my experience with CrossFit while pregnant—and who now see the benefits my son is reaping as a result—have come to me for advice. I hope more women will share their experiences with the CrossFit world so coaches and women know what to expect and how to safely continue with CrossFit workouts during pregnancy.

### **Workouts With a Weighted Belly**

As soon as I found out I was pregnant, I stopped doing muscle-ups and rope climbs as those activities posed a threat of falling. There were so many other things I still could do that there was no point in me taking the chance. I also stopped doing GHD sit-ups because I just wasn't comfortable with the thought of over-using those muscles—they were too close to my precious cargo. Other than that, I didn't scale.

I felt fine with that decision, and my doctors felt that given my current state of fitness, I wasn't causing any harm to my baby. They advised drinking plenty of water to avoid dehydration and monitoring my blood sugar carefully for changes. Because insulin is a hormone, the changes in other hormones in my body would likely have an effect on the level of insulin resistance. I only gained 3 lb. during my first trimester, so pull-ups, sit-ups, running and weight-lifting still felt the same.

During my second trimester, I began to gain weight a little more rapidly and, of course, my belly began to grow. As my center of gravity changed, I scaled box jumps to step-ups. Again, there was no reason to take the chance of falling. As I gained more weight, I had to scale ring dips with a tension band. I continued to lift heavy until I could no longer get into a good starting position. I also scaled way back on intensity during my second trimester. I tried not to do the same workout everyone else was doing because it was difficult to avoid racing against people with whom I was used to competing.

I found out that scaling the intensity caused severe hypoglycemic episodes. I was constantly adjusting insulin intake and testing my blood sugar. I maintained my normal schedule of three days on, one day off, and even on my rest day, my blood sugar would drop at the time I normally worked out. My endocrinologist, with his Harvard medical degree, could not figure out why my insulin needs were being reduced by more than half when pregnant women normally experience heightened insulin resistance. Maybe one day he will believe that there is a correlation between the fact that I continued to do CrossFit through my pregnancy and the low insulin resistance I experienced.



Ethan Cochran

***The author ditched heavy lifting only when she could no longer get into a good starting position.***

My other doctors advised me to ensure I could talk normally during a workout. I decided to employ the tactic of motivating other athletes to ensure I could talk—or yell—normally during a workout. If I found that I couldn't talk or yell comfortably, I slowed down until I could.

About halfway through my second trimester, I began to experience contractions right after working out. Because diabetics are at risk for early labor, my doctor advised me to stop all impact exercises, which included jumping rope and running. There still were plenty of other things I could do, so eliminating running and jump rope wasn't a problem. At six months pregnant, I did Fran as prescribed. It took me almost twice as long as my PR, but I was proud of myself for completing the workout, even with the crazy looks I got.

I continued to work out as my third trimester progressed, but my workouts were untimed and focused on strength. I did light and short rows, pull-ups, box steps, and barbell

and dumbbell lifts. I used dumbbells for any lift that had the potential to hit my belly. At this point, I just wanted to keep moving. I had come this far and felt there was no point in stopping now. There were days when I was so tired and my feet were so swollen that I would tell myself, "Just get to the gym. Once you're there, you will want to work out." I knew I was doing this for the health of my unborn child, and that was motivation for me.

---

**Less than 10 minutes after I started pushing, my son was born. It happened so quickly the doctor tried to slow things down—he wasn't quite ready.**

---



Mary Miller

***Cochran continued to do unassisted pull-ups until the day before she gave birth.***

At the beginning of my third trimester, my blood sugar was suddenly very high. I was being monitored even more closely at this point, and insulin intake doubled. Despite this change, my doctors were all raving at how healthy I was for a high-risk pregnancy. They felt I was in better shape than most non-high-risk pregnant women and in better shape than a lot of women who aren't pregnant at all. The day before I delivered my son, I was in the gym doing unassisted pull-ups. My goal had been to continue doing pull-ups through my pregnancy, as I had worked so hard to be capable of doing unassisted pull-ups prior to getting pregnant. It was important to me that I not lose that.

### **Giving Birth for Time**

The day finally came when it was time to deliver my baby. I had been seeing my doctors several times each week for seven weeks and was starting to experience complications related to diabetes. Because I was four weeks early, the doctor who would be delivering the baby had serious doubts I would be strong enough to deliver, as my body just wasn't ready. He was pretty certain I would be having a C-section. He said when it was time to start pushing, I would push for one to three hours and that the baby may not be able to handle that long of a delivery. Being so early, the baby probably wouldn't be strong enough to sustain that kind of trauma for that long.

When the time came to push, I was determined. I heard "3, 2, 1 ... Go!" in my head. My adrenaline started pumping and all I could think about was that someone doubted I was strong enough to do it, just like I used to doubt myself. After the first push, the doctor was very concerned. The baby's heart rate had dropped, which was normal, but it wasn't rebounding. I was turned on my side to help the baby. Another push and, again, it took the baby's heart rate longer than normal to recover. Less than 10 minutes after I started pushing, my son was born. It happened so quickly the doctor tried to slow things down—he wasn't quite ready.

We later found out that the umbilical cord had been wrapped around the baby's neck. My doctor and all the nurses were amazed. He stated that normally in a situation like this, an emergency C-section is required, as the mother isn't strong enough to deliver the baby quickly enough for the baby's safety. Plus, a baby who is four weeks early with an umbilical cord wrapped around his neck normally isn't strong enough to be safely delivered without a C-section.

My son was born at 5 lb. 11 oz. and 18.5 inches. Because of his size and gestational age, he was immediately classified as a premature baby and examined for problems. After he was examined and scored high on Apgar tests, it was determined he should not be classified as premature because his muscle tone was that of a normal-term baby. By the time he was two months old, he was in the 50th percentile for height and weight. At each doctor's appointment, the pediatrician remarks at my son's strength.

At six months old, when my baby was sitting up, starting to crawl and drinking from a cup rather than a bottle, his doctor said that developmentally he was a nine-month-old baby. At 17 months, he is running, dancing and has perfect squat and deadlift form. We are still working on his push-up form, but his effort is there, trying to imitate mom and dad while we work out.

My advice to pregnant women is to work closely with your doctor. You have to find a doctor you trust, and you have to commit to trusting your doctor. If you aren't comfortable trusting your doctor, find a new one. Other people will offer advice and tell you you should or shouldn't do certain things; listen to what your doctor is saying. Do your own research. If you are reading this article, you have probably



***When pregnant, listen to your body and find a doctor you trust.***

already started. Look at different resources and take the information to your doctor for discussion. Listen to your body. If your body tells you not to deadlift 200 lb. during your second trimester, you should listen. If your body tells you not to deadlift 100 lb. during your first trimester, you should listen.



Mary Miller

***After the baby was born, Cochran was back to her old tricks in almost no time.***

Everyone is different, and you might have to scale more, less or just differently than I did. There will be plenty of time for PRs after your baby is born. Use your pregnancy to focus on form on certain movements, like dumbbell strict presses. At some point, stop running the clock during your workouts. It doesn't matter how fast or slow you are anymore. The important part is you are still moving. The best thing I could have done for myself—and more importantly for my son—was continue to CrossFit during my pregnancy.

I was at my pre-pregnancy weight and hitting PRs within two months of having my son, despite my schedule of being up every few hours to feed him. Because I had continued balancing my meals using Zone principles through my pregnancy, I didn't have that much to lose. After having my son in January 2011, I competed in the 2011 Reebok CrossFit Games Open in March. I nursed him until he was 13 months old, stopping just before this year's Open.

My blood sugar is still leveling out. Although it has been difficult to control, I have learned through CrossFit that nothing is impossible and I am stronger than I think I am. I am a true believer that CrossFit is universally scalable. CrossFit has not only changed my life but also my son's life—before he was even born.



#### **About the Author**

*Catherine Cochran was introduced to CrossFit in 2009 when she and her husband were trying to find a fitness program to which they could fully commit together. She is one of the owners of CrossFit Chantilly in Chantilly, Va., where she coaches adults and kids. Her motivation to get stronger and faster and take care of her medical conditions comes from all the amazing athletes and friends she works out with every day.*