
THE CrossFit LIFE

Confessions of a Reformed CrossFit Hater

As a chiropractor and ultra-marathon runner, Dennis Lesniak spent many years being suspicious of CrossFit. Then he found out it really works.

By Dennis Lesniak

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Cristina Henkel

I started out as a CrossFit hater.

I was first exposed to CrossFit in the fall of 2006 when a few people in chiropractic school heard of it from their military buddies. Some of our friends began embracing the lifestyle, but I thought I was better than CrossFit. I was stronger, faster and fitter. CrossFit workouts were ... fill in the blank—I probably said it.

The biggest turn-off was the supposed randomness, and I was fixated on that aspect. Dips on one day, overhead pressing the next, and push-ups on Day 3—it just seemed like a way to fry my shoulders.

The years went on, and I finished school and opened my own practice. I softened my views about CrossFit a bit, and even used many CrossFit templates and rep schemes for workouts. However, I was still skeptical about the effectiveness and the abilities of the CrossFit paradigm. After all, I was a doctor and had a master's degree in nutrition, a bachelor's degree in exercise science, my Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist papers, my American College of Sports Medicine Health Fitness Specialist certification, and seven years' experience training others—and even more exercising myself. I had successfully completed multiple marathons and a 50-mile ultra-marathon.

Courtesy of Dennis Lesniak



A doctor of chiropractic, Lesniak found himself becoming more and more attracted to CrossFit.

A friend from chiropractic school kept telling me to look into getting a CrossFit certificate. He told us that we were basically already doing it without really knowing it. My wife and I thought about it for about two days. We decided we would take the Level 1 Trainer Course, see if we liked it and go from there.

It was our own ignorance holding us back. Chiropractors fight an uphill battle against the medical community. We often joke when people say, "I don't believe in chiropractic." We respond with, "Good. It isn't a religion. You don't need to believe in it for it to work." Interestingly enough, CrossFit is very similar.

In our chiropractic office, we offer chiropractic care, nutritional counseling and functional rehabilitation, otherwise known as "exercise." We offer a whole-body approach to health. This is exactly what CrossFit does. It is an all-inclusive approach. When you are doing it, you do not need a yoga day, an arms day or a cardio day. You are hitting everything

you need. CrossFit includes so much. It is a perfect plan to have increased general physical preparedness. In fact, it was basically all I used to train for the 2011 Spartan Death Race, and I finished 12th.

As a chiropractor, I want to improve the mobility of my patients and increase their activity level. With CrossFit, I am seeing this happen with all my patients. I can see improvements in many patients, and it literally works for everyone. We have athletes with rheumatoid arthritis, people with full knee replacements, athletes returning from ACL and medial meniscus repairs, those who are very overweight, and elite level athletes all in the same class. The universal scalability is huge, and it allows people to see what will be possible in the future. After a couple of months, people realize that when we eliminate the word "can't" and replace it with "I currently struggle with," we are dead serious. We are giving people the tools to reclaim their lives. We do not do it—we just show them the way.



Cristina Henkel

The good doctor prescribes a set of deadlifts for himself.

My wife was nine months pregnant when we got our Level 1 certificates at CrossFit Morristown. We had some great instructors including Pat Sherwood, Austin Malleolo, Denise Thomas and James Hobart. We were thoroughly impressed by the knowledge and cues handed down. We got home on the night of the third of July, my wife went into labor on the seventh, and our baby was born on the eighth. On the 10th, my wife wanted to know if we had heard back about becoming an affiliate. It was that quick for us, as if a switch was flipped.

We began staging our switch over to CrossFit 716. The exercise space in our office was very modest—900 square feet over a pool that had been covered with plywood and trellised. It was very challenging to do any heavy lifting, let alone any Olympic lifting. We ended up creating more than a dozen dents in the floor that needed to be repaired after a few months.

The transition to becoming an affiliate was huge. We expanded our fitness area by an additional 1,600 square feet. My wife and I are fully immersed in the CrossFit lifestyle and teach that to all our athletes. The most nerve-racking moments of our day are those seconds before the WOD starts. The sweat starts in the palms, you can feel your heartbeat race, the nervousness sets in, and you cannot wait.

We spend our days tweaking our eating trying to find the best ways to get the best fuel. We are constantly searching for better ways to teach and reach people. We are in the business of changing lives, and the only way we can change anyone's life is to lead by example. Both my wife and I are in the best shape of our lives, and we both have our sights set on the 2013 North East Regional. We want to show our athletes what is possible.

CrossFit has become our lives. It permeates everything we do, and that is evident through our families. We have many family members who work out with us on a regular basis and some who have had career shifts because of what we are doing. Every day, we are doing our best to become better in the gym, in our lives, in our chiropractic practice and in our coaching. I think that is exactly what CrossFit is: giving your best—not just once but every day and in everything.

