

# Commando-style workout has cult following

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If only visions of sugarplums were enough. Visions don't plant themselves on your hips. Visions don't require New Year's resolutions.

Come Jan. 1, the ghosts of buffets past will make their presence known in our full-length mirrors. Gym membership cards will get pulled from the far recesses of wallets, and sports bras will find their way back to the front of our dresser drawers. The holidays will be over, and the season for penance will begin.

The latest workout craze is tough, but it's also refreshingly simple.

It's called CrossFit, and you can do it in your own garage, at your gym or in a special CrossFit gym. You can do it by yourself, with a group or with a personal trainer, and it will almost certainly tone up a figgy-pudding figure.

Unlike many fitness trends, CrossFit is more about going back to the basics than reinventing the wheel. In fact, with CrossFit, you're far more likely just to pick up the wheel and throw it, caveman style.

CrossFit was created in the 1970s by a Californian named Greg Glassman, a former gymnast. He started tinkering around with the back-to-the-basics concept when he was working in a weight-lifting gym. He noticed that a lot of the exercises the bodybuilders were doing would make them bigger but not more effective.

He started incorporating gymnastics-type exercises, such as handstand push-ups, into his own weight-lifting routine and began to see that his body performed better.

He then pulled a few moves from power lifting and added techniques such as dead lifts to round out his program. The end result is an exercise philosophy that is more concerned with creating fit, capable, people than it is with building bigger muscles. Glassman says it's a program that virtually anyone can follow and benefit from doing.

"The needs of Olympic athletes and grandparents differ by degree, not kind," explained Glassman.

Comparing CrossFit to most gym workouts is like watching the training sequence in "Rocky IV." Rocky is getting ready to fight the Russian, Ivan Drago. Drago's got the latest, greatest, most high-tech equipment and a team of clipboard-wielding exercise scientists at his disposal. Rocky has an old wagon, a ton of snow, and a drunk guy puffing on a cigar. With CrossFit you are Rocky — not Ivan — only without the drunk guy or the wagon.

"The bulk of what you see in fitness are trends, trends to make fitness interesting or easier," said John Velandra, a Fayetteville trainer and owner of Designs in Fitness, who uses CrossFit to help his clients. "But trends don't address physical needs, and trends don't hold up over time. CrossFit is not just a program; it's a philosophy that stands the test of time."

Though CrossFit has been around for about 30 years, Glassman said it didn't get popular until he started a Web site about five years ago. Now you can find everything you need to know about CrossFit for free at [www.crossfit.com](http://www.crossfit.com).

In fact, almost everything about CrossFit is free, which also sets it apart from other fitness crazes.

A new "Workout of the Day" is posted on the Web site each day, and at first glance the workouts seem deceptively simple. A typical workout takes about a half hour to complete and says something like "Three rounds of: Run 800 meters, 50 Back Extensions, 50 Sit-ups." So three times you run 800 meters, do the 50 back extensions and the 50 sit-

ups, without pausing between rounds. When you're done, you've probably burned about 500 calories, far more than you would have burned just lifting weights or riding an exercise bike for 30 minutes.

Another workout might call for three rounds of 300 squats, 200 pull-ups and 100 push-ups. Try that and see how sore you are the next day. In case you don't know how to do any of the exercises, there's a section on the site with videos of people demonstrating each technique.

Velandra says his clients range in age from 11 to 70 years old. He said he does CrossFit with all of them, though he modifies the exercises based on each client's abilities. "Everything about training should be functional," Velandra said. "Why do you do a dead lift? To lift a child or a basket of laundry. Our clients may train differently, but we use the same CrossFit core with all of them."

The intensity required to finish each workout may be why CrossFit is popular with mixed martial-arts masters such as Becca Borawski and the Ultimate Fighting Championship's Chuck Liddell. It's also a hit with police departments around the country, U.S. special operations forces, and the Canadian military. Oh, and it's popular with kindergarten teachers, artists, lawyers — and just about anyone who doesn't mind sweating a lot.

At Fort Bragg, hundreds of special operations personnel start their days doing CrossFit-type workouts for their physical training, as do Navy SEALs and roughly 7,000 other members of the U.S. military, by Glassman's estimates. From time to time Glassman does CrossFit workshops for special operations and other military personnel. He said he enjoys working with the military because he thinks CrossFit can help make stronger and faster soldiers.

"I just want those guys to come home safely," Glassman said. "I couldn't live with myself if I let them down."

A Special Forces soldier named John said CrossFit has worked well for him because it has improved his overall fitness. "Your whole body benefits, unlike weight lifting, which only affects specific muscle groups. It makes you better at rucking, running and all the things we do. It's a better overall workout because of the range of motion. It doesn't just focus on one muscle group."

There are specific CrossFit gyms all over the country, including CrossFitNC in Raleigh, as well as CrossFit affiliates that operate out of other facilities, including CrossFit Cape Fear, which Velandra runs out of the recreation center at Highland Presbyterian Church.

Glassman travels all over the United States conducting seminars and certifying fitness professionals as CrossFit trainers. He said the CrossFit Web site gets about half a million hits each month, and many of the affiliates have their own sites, as well.

Still, CrossFit's devotees are a small group compared to all the folks committed to such fitness programs as, say, Spinning. CrossFit enthusiasts communicate with one another on message boards and share knowing looks in traditional gyms when they see each other doing the 250th squat, pull-up or powerlifting move. CrossFitters also tend to have the enthusiasm of the newly converted, eagerly explaining to curious onlookers the ins and outs of what they're doing and why they're doing it.

Velandra said the closeness of people in the CrossFit community has amazed him. In October, he and several other trainers at Designs in Fitness traveled to Boston to attend a CrossFit seminar. They stayed with another CrossFitter there, a guy none of them had ever met before. "He just put us up in his house," Velandra said, "I couldn't believe it."

Despite its merits, Velandra said he doesn't think CrossFit will achieve the same popularity that programs such as Spinning, Pilates and Tae Bo have realized. He doesn't think enough people will be willing to train like athletes, certainly not for the long run. But he thinks serious athletes, police officers and soldiers will continue to seek out CrossFit-style workouts.

"CrossFit is probably the very best fitness methodology out there because it deals with the entire body," Velandra said. "Why do one thing here and one thing there when you can just combine everything?"

Rocky would probably agree.

