

CrossFit at 40: How older Athletes Can Thrive in the Sport | WOD Tools

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I did my first CrossFit class a couple of months before I turned 40. I don't quite consider 40 years old to be middle-aged (maybe it's denial) but there are definite differences between the body of my 20-year-old self and my current self.

Having trained in different sports my whole life, it wasn't too difficult to get into the swing of things. And I think that listening to my body, really analyzing the feedback, has helped tremendously with learning and improving. It's important to know when to stop, when to rest, and to know which exercises you need to dial back in intensity.

Here's what I know from personal experience, and what clever people know from studying this kind of thing, about **training for CrossFit for the over 40s**.





Starting CrossFit at 40

Getting started in CrossFit is easy. Just show up with an open mind. I've never seen a box (CrossFit gym) where newbies are not welcome. Some box owners insist on beginners and older athletes taking a special course or personal training package to get them up to speed. Injuries happen when people pump the gas pedal too soon.

Other gyms do not allow drop-ins. Check in advance before heading to your local CrossFit box.

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People are living longer and older athletes are fitter than before. Only a few hundred years ago, people died in their 40s. 40-year-old athletes were almost unheard of in 1919. But in 2019, things are different. Some of the fittest guys and girls in gyms I've trained in around the world are in their 40s, 50s, and above.

Studies have shown that high-intensity workouts can be more beneficial for older athletes. If you want to get in shape at 45 or 50 and really **enjoy your workout routine**, it's the perfect sport to get into. Older athletes lose flexibility and mobility. Until we can replace parts of our bodies (which might happen sooner than we think), we must live with the fact that it gets a little harder to move joints through the full range of motion every year.

But that's not to say it's impossible. On the contrary, 40-somethings (barring injury) should be able to do the same movements as their 20-something friends, but it takes a little more conscious planning and effort.

Sitting at a desk all day, sitting in cars, and doing bench press and arm curls 3 times a week at the gym sets people up for major mobility issues.

We all know people who once they hit 30, complain about not being able to put their hands over their heads to reach up to a cupboard shelf. Unless they have an injury or a particular illness or condition that's not a normal response.

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But with the right training, rest, recovery, and guidance there's no reason you can't be doing muscle-ups, handstand walks, handstand push-ups and other gymnastic movements in a matter of months, if not years. It's just a mindset problem at this stage, not a physical limitation problem.

For inspiration, check out [Mats Strane](#), an Instagram sensation thanks to his impressive displays of calisthenics and gymnastics. Sure, there are thousands of these kinds of Instagram accounts. But what's impressive about Mats is that he's in his 50s and he only began training on the bars and rings in his 40s. He's just an average guy with a higher than average drive to make the most of his body.

CrossFit men and women that compete in their 40s are classified as masters (in the competitive arena). Back in the day (CrossFit isn't that old, but you get my drift), the over 40s athletes were still relative newbies to this sport. These days, many **masters athletes have been doing WODs for 20 years**. There's not much difference between their 45-year-old bodies and their 35-year-old ones. They kill it in the WODs.

Essential ingredients for CrossFit at 40 and above

If you're planning on getting fit after 40 or even if you already do CrossFit, the following advice will help you progress, avoid injury, and enjoy workout out. Being fit after 40 doesn't require superhuman skills. It requires extra planning and intelligent execution.

Exercise Less

For me, Recovery is one of the most important aspects. You might not want to hear it but taking a day off, or several days off between workouts can really help your progress. Rest brings results. If you love being active and can't consider a day without exercise, incorporate a day of stretching and mobility into your week.

Break up your high-intensity WODs with gentle running, swimming, biking, or walking. If you've hit your shoulders hard one day, you could get away with some squats or lunge work the following day.

Keep in mind that just because your localized muscles are not sore doesn't mean that you don't

Keep in mind that just because your localized muscles are not sore doesn't mean that you don't need to recover. Recovery is a full body thing. It's also a mental thing. Fatigue, both physical and mental can hinder your progress faster than an injury. Don't let overtraining be your downfall.

Dial In Your Nutrition

The days of eating pizza and slugging beers the night before a workout should be well gone. Alcohol, junk food, and CrossFit do not make a happy threesome. One of the best things you can do to up your nutrition game is to reduce your intake of what Hugh Jackman calls **HI-foods**. HI stands for Human Interference. Jackman has maintained an impressive physique right into his 50s and considers his nutritional choices a big part of this.

Removing foods from your diet that have been altered or processed (by humans) will help lower the levels of toxins and chemicals that build up over time. Eat clean, unprocessed foods and fuel your body for training as you get older.

Cortisol – the muscle killer

Cortisol, the body's stress hormone, is beneficial in small amounts. But high cortisol is associated with fatigue, weight gain, irritability, and reduced immune response. For female athletes, endurance workouts can lead to the dreaded [belly fat thanks to long periods of spikes in cortisol levels](#).

Cortisol is lower in the evenings so it might be worth considering changing your workout schedule if you're a morning person. Even moving a couple of sessions in a week to later times might have a positive effect.

Consider taking [adaptogens](#), substances (usually plant-based) that protect your body against stress by adapting to what it needs.

Stay flexible

It's easier to get injured at 40 than it is as a younger athlete. Your muscles aren't quite as strong, your ligaments and tendons are a little less forgiving, and mobility will never be what it was as a teenage athlete.

As you get older, flexibility decreases. That's a fact. Even the most supple athletes among us become less mobile past the age of around 18. It's just how the body works. Of course, you can mitigate the effects to some extent. And you should. Staying flexible as you get older is one of the best ways of reducing injury, increasing blood flow, and priming the body for exercise.

In my opinion, one of the **best aspects of CrossFit is that it builds mobility, flexibility, and even gymnastic skills into workouts**. Older athletes who are just beginning training might feel overwhelmed but there's no reason to walk away. Just be aware that it takes longer for a 40-something CrossFitter to learn to handstand walk than a younger athlete. It also requires careful planning and training to avoid injury.

20-year-olds bounce back from mistakes. 40-somethings have a habit of breaking.

Keep it short, stupid

2-hour workouts might be fine for young athletes at peak fitness levels. Anything over 1 hour for the over 40s is heading into dangerous territory.

We all know those people that run ultra-marathons in their 50s and 60s. They're an exception. They are conditioned to perform at a high level. But there are major downsides to spending long hours doing aerobic exercise. Or anaerobic, for that matter. Marathon running and long cardio sessions have a catabolic effect on your body. As you get older, this can wreak havoc with your hormones.

As guys get older, testosterone decreases. So the last thing men should do is speed up this process. Studies show that [high-volume aerobic training can decrease testosterone](#) in men

If you care about your strength levels and your Olympic lifting performance, it's wise to stay away from the 2-hour marathons or triple back-to-back Murph WODs.

Short, intense workouts are superb for older CrossFit athletes. Especially for those that care about their resting testosterone levels. A study from 2018 published in the [Endocrine Connections journal](#) found that "*HIIT produces increases in muscle power and free testosterone in male masters athletes*"

The [HIIT training protocol](#), in case you didn't know, is like CrossFit's training protocol in that it emphasizes **short, high-intensity workouts**.

An alternative to pounding the pavement for hours or cycling until your body catabolize muscle tissue is walking. And by walk, I mean a 10,000 step march or medium to fast-paced walk. Walking is low impact, low stress and can induce feel-good hormones. It's a good complimentary exercise to high-intensity CrossFit workouts and will get you moving without destroying your body.

Mix It Up

If you're already doing CrossFit regularly, then this advice doesn't apply. Over 40 and thinking about getting into CrossFit? Here's why you should.

Doing the same old workout you've been doing since your teens will not help improve your strength or fitness. CrossFit's mantra of '[constantly varied](#)' workouts keeps the muscles guessing. And this is important for older athletes. Sticking with routine means lapsing into a state of equilibrium or even regression.

Keep in mind that if you're not improving, you are going backward.

Training Program Changes?

CrossFit workout routines for men and women over 40 should not be any different to those programmed for the rest of your gym or CrossFit box's athletes. The higher risk of injury might warrant a reduction in intensity in exercises such as the snatch and in some gymnastic movements.

Flexibility is the key here. If you're highly mobile, go for it. But don't skimp on the weight if you can manage it. Lifting heavy will [help strengthen bone and muscle](#) better than lifting light. Forget the light weights.

People often believe that once we hit a certain age, it's wise to reduce training intensity and lighten the loads. But training with [higher loads increases strength gains and muscle size](#) even in elderly patients.

There's nothing stopping us from lifting heavy and participating in CrossFit at any age.



