

Manage your risk of injury during high intensity training to reap the benefits

# RISK vs REWARD

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**T**he Chaos Theory, also called the butterfly effect, is a theory that studies how small, incremental changes at a particular place in time can have a larger effect at a later stage. It is a theory that is used in many schools of thinking and study, and is illustrated by the popular Zen saying of how a butterfly flapping its wings can cause a hurricane in another part of the world.

In 2000, in a small gym called CrossFit North in Seattle, Washington, Greg Glassman's CrossFit butterfly was gently flapping its wings. Leap forward 14 years later and hurricane CrossFit has taken the health and fitness world by storm. It brought with it new ideas and even its own language.

This boom in CrossFit has accompanied a boom in a popular trend towards functional training as a whole, from metabolic conditioning-type training to programmes which mimic strongman training and methodologies.

## FORM

**If anything, I'm a big fan of the ability of high intensity training modalities such as CrossFit to produce huge physical changes in people's bodies, its multi-functional approach to training and the elite fitness required to compete at the top level - the CrossFit Games.** Like all colonising ships of ancient empires that unwittingly carried new types of diseases to new lands and native populations, the boom in the various forms of functional training, including CrossFit, has also exposed people to new types of exercise movements that they had never seen before.

Burpees are no longer military favourites as they're now performed by the novice athlete. Things such as power cleans, jerks and snatches all take years to master (I have read how the old Communist Block countries of Eastern Europe started teaching talented

school children these movements with broom sticks) and yet people now perform them often, and not just a single repetition but many of them against the clock. If you add fatigue into this mix your form is one of the first things to suffer, and that leads to a higher possibility of picking up an injury.

## INJURY

**With a multi-functional approach to training injuries tend not to be limited to certain parts of the body. Now just about every joint and muscle is susceptible to trauma if form goes out the window.** Often injuries in the extremities, usually in the arms or rotator cuffs of the shoulder, which result from snatching or other power movements, are only symptomatic problems and can be resolved by sorting out the primary dysfunction in the neck, jaw or between the shoulder blades. Pain in the biceps and anterior deltoid (if you don't have a tear) can often be resolved by releasing the pectoral muscles. Even lateral, mid-arm pain can be relieved by sorting out the tender infraspinatus that tightens when you hold a heavy weight with your arms extended above your head.

Pelvic and lower back problems that can be caused by performing power movements incorrectly have the knock on effect of possibly creating problematic knees and ankles. Even a tightened psoas muscle from performing burpees with poor form can lead to complications in the joint of your big toe. A tight deep front line (myofascial line of tension) can cause foot inversion. In that instance coming off of a box jump can put you at a greater risk of ankle sprains.

**FORM: JUST ABOUT EVERY JOINT AND MUSCLE IS SUSCEPTIBLE TO TRAUMA IF FORM GOES OUT THE WINDOW.**



Pelvic and lower back problems can be caused by performing power movements incorrectly.



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
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**LEARN TO PROPERLY EXECUTE THE EXERCISES THAT ARE FOREIGN TO YOU.**

### **RISK VERSUS REWARD**

So, as with all physical activity, there is always an increased risk of injury when engaging in an activity that you are not used to. You can however limit your injury risk by making sure that you join a gym that has a proven track record and credentials. Most successful CrossFit boxes have beginner or on-boarding classes, as well as intermediate and advanced classes. As such the time will be taken to teach new members how to properly execute the exercises that are foreign to you. The top boxes in SA are also owned by passionate trainers who have experience in strength and conditioning training and understand the importance of safety and injury prevention.

CrossFit has been a fitness industry game changer as it appeals to an extremely broad market. If I look at the heterogeneous mix of people that I get through my clinic doors with niggles, it has a massive broad spectrum appeal. It is also, in a word, "addictive", and that's coming from a housewife client who had never stepped inside a gym before becoming a CrossFitter. Leading an active lifestyle always puts your body at a higher risk of injury, but the health benefits of CrossFit and other high intensity, functional modalities, when performed properly and responsibly, outweighs the negatives.

Vince Lombardi, the famous American football coach always said: "Fatigue makes cowards of us all". What he was implying is that being unfit made football players ineffective and unable to perform at their best. This can be related to the form required when taking part in high-intensity training. When fatigue starts to set in to your body while training the war for oxygen between your muscles and brain intensifies, and this can lead to drops in concentration and subsequent decreases in form. Poor form

**WHEN FATIGUE STARTS TO SET IN TO YOUR BODY WHILE TRAINING THE WAR FOR OXYGEN BETWEEN YOUR MUSCLES AND BRAIN INTENSIFIES, AND THIS CAN LEAD TO DROPS IN CONCENTRATION AND SUBSEQUENT DECREASES IN FORM.**

repeated consistently can lead to biomechanical dysfunction and its related injuries. This will leave you in a place where the ability to explore your physical and mental limits are restricted. It is therefore best that you engage in CrossFit and any other form of high intensity training with the right approach, and under the best guidance to reap the rewards, and without all the potential pitfalls. And if you do get injured, don't train through it. Injury and dysfunction begets further dysfunction when not addressed properly. ■

*Sean Johnson is a Bowen Practitioner and Instructor, with a practice based in Randburg, Johannesburg. He has played provincial rugby at senior level in South Africa and in Australia. Following a herniated disc Sean's playing career was in jeopardy, but he then found Bowen Therapy and made a successful return to the field. Bowen Therapy did what doctors said was impossible, which had an indelible impact on Sean's life. He therefore became a certified Bowen practitioner and later an instructor. Email sean@bowentechnique.co.za for more info or visit him at The Yoga Republic in Gertrude Road, Fontainebleau.*