Illinois Bone & Joint Institute's Tips to Stay in the Box: How Chicagoans Can CrossFit Safely

Illinois Bone & Joint Institute

CrossFit: It's one of the most popular fitness trends to hit exercise culture in years. The company has brand-trained fitness professionals in more than 13,000 official CrossFit gyms around the world and 30 in the city of Chicago.

However, like any high intensity sport or fitness regimen, proper precautions and form are imperative to maximizing the positive effects and minimizing injury risk of CrossFit's mix of weightlifting, gymnastics and high intensity cardio.
With a 2015 study from the Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine pointing to an approximate 20 percent injury rate among frequent CrossFitters, the most common injuries being minor sprains and strains, the doctors and athletic trainers of Chicago-based Illinois Bone & Joint Institute (IBJI) offer advice on how to safely enjoy your workout. IBJI is one of the largest independent orthopedic practices in the U.S. with locations throughout Chicago and northern Illinois.

Board-certified orthopedic surgeon and fellowship-trained sports medicine and shoulder surgery specialist Dr. Richard Kang sees patients at IBJI’s Barrington area offices and regularly works with athletes and fitness fanatics rehabbing injuries.

"CrossFit is one of my favorite workouts because, if done correctly and with appropriate trainer guidance, it's a workout that anyone can benefit from -- no matter your age, weight or prior experience," said Dr. Kang. "Unfortunately, many of the CrossFit injuries I see are the result of people not working out correctly. Elements like form and instruction are so important in CrossFit, and many of the related injuries I treat can be avoided."

Here are some of IBJI's top tips for CrossFitters:

- **Be Coachable**: Educated and engaged instructors will help you perfect your form and technique. The involvement of experienced and qualified trainers has been associated with decreasing injury rates. On the contrary, athletes who try exercises without much supervision are more prone to injury. Don't be afraid or intimidated by the instructor. Ask him/her to check your form regularly to ensure your using proper form.

- **Focus on personal goals -- not winning**: While competition can be motivational, some people can get a little carried away with the rivalry. It's important to stay focused on your own personal goals and why you're working out in the first place. Aim for personal achievements and you'll find greater self-efficacy and long-term motivation.

- **Listen to your body**: If an exercise just doesn't feel right or is uncomfortable to the point of feeling pain, just stop. Muscle soreness is common, but severe, debilitating pain during a movement or even in the days following a workout could signal a serious injury.

- **Avoid muscle fatigue**: Tired muscles can lead to increased injury rates, because, often times, fatigue leads to poor form. Fitness enthusiasts need to be self-aware when it comes to recognizing fatigue and either scale down a workout or take a day off.

By following these precautions and listening to the body, fitness enthusiasts can safely participate in CrossFit workouts and minimize the risk for injury. For more on IBJI, visit https://www.ibji.com/.