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The New York Times

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## God's Workout



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Published: March 23, 2008

**The superfit walk among us. They saunter or strut, depending on whether they're showcasing their magnificent agility or their oxlike strength. They ignore the chatter in the health media over treadmill technique and pedometer steps. They scoff even at seemingly rigorous practices like Mysore Ashtanga yoga and marathon training. They are America's self-styled fitness elite, adherents of a punishing online exercise regime called CrossFit, which orders its followers to cultivate**

**a distinctly martial — not to say paranoid — ideal of “physical preparedness.”**

CrossFit has 450 chapters in 43 states (and several other countries). The network has a message for the merely healthy: “Your workout is our warm-up.” Every day, its members consult [CrossFit.com](http://CrossFit.com) like a Book of Common Prayer, receiving instructions for their workout rites and periods of rest. Performing caveman feats like hauling, clambering, trudging, snatching, hurling and deadlifting, CrossFitters deliberately overwhelm and distress their bodies, executing near-impossible stunts with as much weight as they can bear. A Workout of the Day, or W.O.D., might include 50 kettlebell swings, 3 800-yard dashes in rapid succession and 10 pull-ups. Then repeat. No breaks. No weight machines. All you need is a body built for discipline and a mind that can justify so much apparent self-abuse.

**The spare site is the foundation of the CrossFit ministry. It resembles not so much a gym as a system of alleys, a rough-hewn underground network designed to train a super-race that wouldn't be out of place in Marvel Comics. On a typical day, some 200 people post responses to the workout. (*This looks fun, if by fun I mean painful and heinous . . . cry from pain . . . my hands are toast . . . lightheaded and dizzy . . . whoop, whoop!*) It's an exercise phenomenon custom-made for this moment in Web history: CrossFit couldn't exist without lots of speedy, uploadable video; social networking; and an expansive platform for international, demographically varied community interaction. Many of the official demo videos feature women, and even among the rank and file, women are everywhere. A scan of members' posted ages shows that participants are between 20 and 60, with many in their 30s. (There's also a kids' program.)**

**Even if handstand pushups have no place in your life, there's something eye-opening and even inspiring about the site's aggressive ambitions for the human body. Like urban-gymnast *traceurs* and other daredevils who have come into their own on digital video, CrossFitters offer themselves as evidence that people are capable of more than merely giving up sugar for Splenda and taking the stairs occasionally; according to the CrossFit creed, they can and should**

also be prepared to fell trees, tame bulls and carry families of four on their backs. Olympians, soldiers, police officers, firefighters and devoted fitness amateurs convene on the site, reveling in max squats and circus-strongman stunts, which they repeat as many as 100 times per workout. This is exercise not for vanity or for longevity but for an imagined moment of heroism that may never come.

CrossFit's founder, Greg Glassman, is referred to by his disciples simply as Coach, which contributes to the program's cultlike vibe. A former gymnast who put his longtime training program online in 2001, Glassman is known for his impatience with exercisers who fear injury: "There's nothing about crashing that makes you drive faster, right? But you're not going to learn to drive real fast unless you've wrecked once or twice." In brazen, inventive, hortatory speeches and prose, he leans on the conceit of "forging," blacksmith style. His Web site is "forging elite fitness," and his message board is "forging elite community." CrossFit represents a ministry for Glassman, who is intent on drafting and redrafting his program — so intent, in fact, that he has said he works out inconsistently.

The enemies in the eyes of the CrossFit crowd are "Stairmaster chumps" (who log long, drowsy hours on the machines but huff and puff on actual stairs) and myopic "specialists" — athletes or exercisers who neglect versatility in order to refine one or two skills. The CrossFitters' critique has chastened at least one specialist. An essay by a triathlete named Tom Demerly titled "How Fit Are We?" appeared on a biking blog, conceding that if triathletes "found ourselves in a jam that required overall physical fitness to survive, we'd probably be in trouble." Further admitting that he could barely do a single pull-up, Demerly went on to praise the fitness of a CrossFit type he had met named Joe Sparks, who "gave a demonstration using a 50-pound kettlebell making it look like he was maneuvering a tennis ball."