

# Achieve Fitness Gains Through Cross Training

By Ronald F. Hollis, MD



**Are you bored with your workouts?** Dread working out but need to lose weight? Are you a single sport or endurance athlete? Lack motivation to move? Dealing with a persistent pain that refuses to diminish? Suffer from chronic illness and need to move more? If "yes" is the answer to any of these questions, you will benefit from cross training.

## Mix it up!

Cross training utilizes multiple activities to achieve more complete fitness gains. The building blocks of cross training include the following four activities: aerobic conditioning, strength, balance, and flexibility. Mixing up the combination of activities over the course of weeks will keep your workouts fresh and provide your body with a variety of movements. In fact, almost all activities will fall into one or more of the basic building blocks of cross training, thus allowing anyone to find their ideal combination.

Two key principles of cross training are to vary activity type and intensity levels. For example, high intensity aerobic activities like running and biking can be complemented with yoga, which provides flexibility and balance. Not everyone needs to engage in high intensity aerobic conditioning. Equally effective aerobic exercises include hiking, walking, swimming and even yard work. These activities vary in intensity and can be quite enjoyable. Additionally, there are many alternatives to building strength if a weight room or CrossFit isn't part of your lifestyle. Exercise bands, body resistance exercises, TRX classes, and workout videos that can be done in the comfort of your own home and are equally effective strength building choices. Yoga and Pilates are both excellent ways to build strength, as well as improve balance and flexibility. There are endless possibilities and combinations that can easily be tailored to your individual interests.

**Health and fitness gains are ensured** if you find the right combination of enjoyable activities and consistently perform them. Following are examples of cross training benefits.

## Remain Injury Free

Reduction of injury is a primary benefit of cross training. If you are a single sport athlete, training your body for just one activity puts more stress on all the muscles and bones involved in that activity. The more you train, the more you risk overuse, which in turn increases your risk of injury. The vast majority of injuries from exercise are caused by repetitive trauma and fatigue that are often seen with high impact activities such as running and biking. In my orthopaedic practice, it is common to treat marathon runners and long distance cyclists with chronic injuries due to the repetitive impact their lower extremities are subjected to. Medical studies have demonstrated significant increases in aerobic capacity and performance with concurrent reduction in injury rates among runners who cross train.

## Enhance Weight Loss

Effective, long-term weight loss and subsequent health improvements are sustained through incorporating a quality exercise program with diet modification. For people with very limited time for exercise, aerobic conditioning is superior for burning calories; however, cardio training doesn't do much to build muscle. Furthermore, a singular focus on aerobic conditioning leads to boredom, which impacts motivation and consistency. Strength training can burn as much, if not more fat than aerobic workouts, as well as increasing muscle mass. Achieving and maintaining weight loss will become easier by incorporating cross training activities you find enjoyable.

## Accelerate Injury Rehabilitation

Cross training is a great way to recover from an injury. Last year, after suffering a severe calf strain running my favorite portion of the Sante Fe trail, I turned to biking to maintain my fitness level. I could easily handle riding a bike on flat areas, but running was out of the question. Sustaining an injury also impacts people mentally. When presented with a setback, it's very easy to write off exercising when the thing you love to do most is no longer an option. It's important to concentrate on what you can do - not what you can't do - when facing an injury. Accepting the injury and dealing with it through cross training activities is the healthiest alternative to a stressful situation.

## Maintain Motivation

Repetitive exercise routines can get boring and monotonous. To freshen your routine, introduce some new activity every 4-6 weeks. If you enjoy group exercise classes, try substituting a step cardio class for spinning. Trade in your running shoes for a swim suit and try aqua-running! Eliminate a cardio day completely and try yoga. Remember, varying intensity levels and activities garners the most health benefits.

## Reframe Your Thinking

A fresh, new approach to exercise through cross training reduces injuries, accelerates injury rehabilitation, facilitates weight loss, and improves motivation. More importantly, cross training can reframe your approach to exercise. Revisit the questions posed at the beginning of this article. What is your current lens from which you approach exercise? How can the benefits of cross training help you reframe the answers to those questions?



## About the Author

Dr. Hollis is a Peregrine resident and orthopaedic surgeon with Colorado Springs Orthopaedic Group. His primary specialty areas include treatment of shoulder disorders, sport injuries, knee problems and fracture care. He currently serves as the team doctor for the Colorado Springs Sky Sox baseball team, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, and Coronado High School. For more information about Dr. Hollis, visit [www.csog.net](http://www.csog.net) or call 719-632-7669.



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