

What Is Your Definition of Fitness?

What comes to mind when you hear the word “fitness?” Endless rows of treadmills, an outdoor track covered with hurdles, a Pilates classroom filled with mats, towels and foam rollers? Or perhaps you envision a basketball team, tennis player, or strong shoulders and burly biceps.

Each of the above associations undeniably exemplifies an aspect of fitness. Treadmills and other pieces of cardio equipment, including the street you live on, help develop stamina and cardio-respiratory endurance. Pilates is excellent for improving flexibility and balance.

Hurdlers must have exceptional speed and power. Basketball and tennis players work hard to be not only fast but also agile, accurate and coordinated every second they’re on the court. And as for those big biceps, you can bet the men and women who have them are lifting some heavy weights; strength is yet another marker of fitness.

As you can see, fitness is difficult to define succinctly. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it as “the quality or state of being fit.” That then begs the question, “*Well, what is ‘fit’?*” “Fit,” according to Merriam-Webster, means “in good physical condition; in good health.” An example sentence the dictionary offers is, “He’s fit for the race.”

But is “he”—we’ll call him Phil—fit for activities and recreational sports that require good hand-eye coordination? Is Phil fit for picking up heavy sacks of groceries in a safe manner and carrying them up three flights of stairs to his apartment? Is Phil fit for squatting down comfortably to play with his baby daughter or new grandchild? Phil may be a top-notch endurance athlete or sprinter, but he may be *unfit* in

several other areas outside of his athletic specialty.

It's probably safe to assume that most of you reading this are not professional athletes whose job it is to eat, sleep and train to be the best at a specific sport. Your livelihood likely does not depend on how fast or coordinated or strong you are. However, as followers of Christ and temples of His Holy Spirit, we are encouraged, indeed *commanded*, to honor our bodies; keeping physically fit is one primary way we can do this.

Now to revisit the question, "What is fitness?"...

After years of weightlifting, I began to grow weary of my favorite machines and go-to exercises. What had once been fun and challenging had become predictable and dull. I knew I needed to branch out before boredom turned working out into a burden, something it had never been to me before. It was at about that time that I was introduced to CrossFit.

Before I go any further, I want to emphasize that the remainder of this article is not intended to be a plug for CrossFit, but rather for overall fitness. (I realize and respect that CrossFit may not be everyone's cup of tea!) Having said that, I would like to share one of the first things that greatly impacted me when I was introduced to CrossFit—something I think you will find quite valuable as well, and that is a clear and applicable definition of fitness.

For the purposes of this article, I wish to focus on the first section of CrossFit's fitness definition, what is referred to as "CrossFit's First Fitness Standard." This standard identifies 10 domains of physical fitness:

- Cardiovascular/respiratory endurance
- Stamina
- Strength
- Flexibility

- Power
- Speed
- Coordination
- Agility
- Balance
- Accuracy

Greg Glassman, one of the founders of CrossFit, writes, “You are as fit as you are competent in each of these 10 skills.”

Just before switching up my routine and giving CrossFit a try, I remember moving into a new apartment that was on the third floor. I huffed and I puffed from beginning to end. My legs shook. My arms hurt. I went to bed early and woke up the following morning feeling stiff, sore, and still completely exhausted. *I’m fit*, I thought. *I lift weights four days a week and walk for an hour or more twice a week. How is it I feel so out of shape?*

When I began CrossFit, it became even more apparent that my fitness level was severely lacking. I had strength thanks to weightlifting and balance and flexibility due to Yoga stretches and occasional Pilates classes, but when it came to running hard and fast or being coordinated enough to perform more complicated movements, I was unpleasantly surprised. I had never felt more *unfit* in all my life.

But I persevered. Slowly but surely, my endurance improved, taking a 10-minute mile down to a 7-minute one. My stamina improved, allowing me to do 27 push-ups without taking a break instead of 10 or 12. My accuracy and coordination improved, showing me that I could in fact throw a 14-pound medicine ball to a 10-foot-high target, then squat while catching the ball, and repeat that sequence 150 times without falling down or getting smacked in the face once.

One of my CrossFit goals was met recently: being able to do a strict muscle-up!

I haven't tried moving into a third-floor apartment again, but I feel confident that it would be a breeze in comparison to the last time. I feel as though I am ready for just about any physical task life throws at me. My back is strong for lifting groceries, children or pieces of furniture. My heart and lungs are up for the task of running or walking long distances. My joints are flexible and ligaments elastic, helping protect me from injury, and I enjoy complete range of motion in daily activities.

The next question is: How fit are *you*?

If you are in a rut, as I was, in which you do nearly identical routines week after week, it's probable that your fitness level is unbalanced.

A balanced approach to fitness enables you to be physically prepared for the unforeseen challenges life presents, from handling unexpected tasks at home to enjoying God's creation and the body He's given you via long, luxurious hikes or intense outdoor sports. Becoming fit in each of the 10 fitness domains benefits us *mentally* as well for the simple reason that having achieved tough tasks in the gym, on the track, or wherever you choose to train provides us the confidence to conquer myriad other things that pop up on any given day. Plus, it has been proven that learning new skills and exercises that require concentration can make you smarter!

I challenge you to test yourself this week. Warm up well and then try running quickly for half a mile or cycling for 30 minutes at a moderate pace and see how you feel. Try squatting a few times until your hip crease is below your knees and see if you can maintain an upright torso and keep your weight in your heels. See how many push-ups you can do in one minute. Sit on the floor, reach out and try to touch your toes. Try to do one pull-up. See how many times you can jump onto a plyometric box in 30 seconds. These are just a few things you can do to help detect any holes in your fitness.

After your weak points have been determined, put a plan in place to work on them a few days each week, be it through a kickboxing or strength-training class, a running group, a fitness DVD, or yes, even CrossFit! Have fun trying new things, and don't let your comfort zone or frustration during the transition phase discourage you from continuing. Starting new things is never without its initial hesitancies and hiccups, but more often than not, sticking it out and staying the course is richly rewarding.

All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.

Stay fit, stay faithful.

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