

CROSSFIT FOR PREGNANT ATHLETES

This is a collection of reports from three CrossFit women, Annie, Tara and Jennifer. They were of varied physical proportions, personalities, and fitness levels going into their pregnancies, and all three continued with their workouts through their pregnancies and beyond. Their experiences, challenges and reactions are unique for each and honestly expressed. Jennifer had two Coaches who were sensitive to how she was handling the workouts and, in that regard, she reminds us that "everyone is different". Tara's experience was against the background of CrossFit's beginnings; she was a "first", for both her CrossFit Coach and her Obstetrician. Annie was fit even before she started CrossFit; she was a shoe-in when she walked in the door, smiling big and full of "vim, vigor and vitality." With a few good rules from her Obstetrician to guide her, she watched out for herself. If you, as a CrossFitter, are pregnant or want to be, I hope that you will find some guidance and encouragement in these three different accounts. I would like to thank Annie, Tara and Jennifer for the generous contribution of their time and their refreshing openness about that special prenatal time in CrossFit.

If you want to go back 45 years, I can tell you that I rode my bike up and down the hills of Woodland Hills, California every single day during my pregnancy and coincidentally, lurking very near in that neighborhood was, I am told, a boy called Greg Glassman.

I recently stumbled across Carli's website. She is a 33 year old CrossFit mom and fitness/nutrition enthusiast living in Vancouver, Canada. Here is the link to one of her informative blogs about **weight lifting during pregnancy**.

<http://onefitmom.ca/2011/02/17/pregnancy-myth-2-no-heavy-lifting/>

Mary Boudreau Conover/ 14 June 2013

ANNIE

At 29 years old, I was two years into intense, high level CrossFit training and at the peak fitness of my life when I got pregnant with my daughter, Dylan. My first pregnancy came at a time when I was well launched into a whole new world of fitness. Back then, in the early days of CrossFit, although there was no competition for the CrossFit games – no CrossFit games period, there was plenty of intense training and mini-competitions in the gym. Almost every day there were others to workout with — Eva, Greg Amundson, Dave Leys, Brent Edwards, Mike Weaver and Thomas Crubaugh.

First Trimester

Rule number one. At first, I was a little nervous about working out during my pregnancy. Nobody at the gym had much advice on the subject and, back then, outside the gym very few even knew about CrossFit. When I went to my OB, she didn't know much about CrossFit either, although she did know that it was high intensity and gave me a rule to follow for my workouts that I followed for my entire pregnancy. She said that if I could speak fairly easily, my baby was getting enough oxygen. If I was having trouble

getting words out – talking at all, I needed to slow down. Even with this in mind, I never had to totally hold back. Remember I was only 29 years old and at peak physical fitness. I wouldn't have tried for a sub-three minute Fran, but I was probably at about 85 to 90% intensity.

For one of my OB visits, my husband, Jake, went with me. His question for the doctor was: "Should she still be doing pull-ups?" At that point, although my doctor had started to understand CrossFit a little more, she didn't *really* understand exactly what CrossFit was because she said: "As long as she's careful about getting on and off the machine." Jake said: "No, you don't understand!" And I was giving him elbows like, you'd better not ruin this for me. So I kept doing pull-ups.

Rule number two. My OB did say that I shouldn't be doing heavy lifting that required bearing down. So, no 1Rmax and no real heavy straining kind of lifting. Even though 55 lb thrusters were not heavy for me maybe 155 lbs on a deadlift was. I backed off on things that required tightening and bearing down; no 1Rmax and no PR effort were the rules I went by.

Squatting. I kept squatting below parallel with weight. At 6 or 7 months when my belly started to grow, I ended up with an inguinal hernia and that hurt. For a long time I blamed it on the fact that Jake and I were emptying out our garage and moving a lot of heavy stuff, but now I really think it was because I was squatting below parallel with weight, plus added baby-weight and the stretching and possibly weakening of the abdominals. I was lucky because the inguinal hernia went away as soon as I gave birth and as the pressure of the baby's head was gone. But in all honesty, that inguinal hernia hurt like the dickens for most of my pregnancy. So I tell people now when they email me, that I stopped squatting, especially with weight, even at or above parallel. It's only a few months. It's a small sacrifice to make.

Migraines. During my first trimester I had migraines about once a week. I'd been prone to them all my life, when they were less frequent but more intense. During those first three months, they were very frequent, but not as intense. I'd get the aura and the dull pain in my eyes. After the first trimester it was gone.

Second and Third Trimesters

Rope climbing, box-jumping. Around 6 months, when my belly got bigger, my balance was off, so I stopped doing things like rope climbing, box-jumping, and anything that required a little bit more balance or was up in the air, where there was any sort of safety issue.

Running. Running really started to hurt at about 6 months. So I just stopped running and would row instead — still a great workout and I got what I needed. I'd listen to my body. I *hurt* when I ran — low belly, I just felt heavy and really uncomfortable.

Pull-ups, double-unders, handstands. Pull-ups still felt good. Double-unders felt fine for me and I continued handstands during the entire pregnancy. For me, the handstands felt good because the pressure went the other way. There was definitely a lot of debate. Greg posted a picture of me fairly pregnant in a handstand and I caught a lot of flack for it. But I did it for both pregnancies and I felt OK and actually got a little relief. Prior to my pregnancy, I had been doing handstands a lot and for a long time. It wasn't like I just tried my first handstand at six-months pregnant.

Energy fluctuations. On days when I didn't have a lot of energy, I would come in and just move. I would try to not have a lot of expectations, although I had to do whatever the workout was. If I felt really tired, I would modify the workout; maybe just move a little to get some blood flow. Some days when I came in, I felt great. I had a ton of energy and I would go for it, obeying the rules of making sure I could still speak; no max efforts; no max lifts. Pull-up felt great, rowing was good — most of that kind of stuff. So I just did what felt good day-by-day.

On my due-date I was still working at home and pretty much starting to scale back. I went into labor the night after what Tony now calls "The Inducer" — 7 rounds of 7 wall-balls and 7 pull-ups. That night I started labor; I think coincidentally, more than anything.

The first baby was low, but her head was tilted so I wasn't dilating. So, I went in and out of active labor for about five-days straight and I would get within that two-minutes contraction every two minutes for almost an hour and then they would go to 10-minutes and 15-minutes apart. So I went in and out of labor for five days. We may have slept 4 or 5 hours, because it would come and go. At that point, I was just home with Jake, and walking, and trying to deal with the long interrupted labor. Finally, in the hospital, they realized that the baby's head was just a little bit tilted, so it wasn't pushing on my cervix to dilate it. Although I had wanted to do all-natural, I was so tired from not sleeping for four or five days that my OB suggested the epidural. I agreed, and my baby was out in 2 hours with maybe 7 pushes, maybe 20 minutes. I could push just fine with the epidural. Dylan was 7 lbs, 13 oz. about 19.5 inches. We took her home and hunkered down for the first three days. Just walking around the house was enough at that point.

After about a week, I went into the gym to show Dylan to everyone, but had absolutely no desire to workout — *none*. After another week I took walks with the baby. That felt good, but I still had no desire to even go to the gym. The thought of a squat or any workout at all was totally unappealing.

At three weeks postpartum I came back to the gym and just eased into it. There were no expectations like: "I gotta be doing Fran in less than 5 min in 5 weeks or I've failed as a CrossFitter." I just wanted to get moving and get out of the house. So my first time back was great, especially because if I stayed at home, it could be 3 o'clock and everyone could still be in their pajamas, crying and hysterical. It was hard because I wasn't getting enough sleep, but I think that having a place to go and seeing everyone at the gym was very big. There were so many moms and dads and people who loved me and wanted to

help me or hold the baby while I had a snack. There was no postpartum depression and I think the social interaction was a big part of it.

I was slowly increasing my workouts and thinking about all the people who say: "Nine months up; nine months down." — they don't do CrossFit; they don't know what it means to be fit. A few months later, I was working out pretty good and not worrying about things like body shape. When I look back at pictures of myself at about 6 or 7 months postpartum, I still had some baby weight on me, but no worries. I based my workouts on energy level and how I felt. I felt good and happy to be working out. I kept doing what I was doing.

My Second Pregnancy — Still CrossFitting

The second baby was a boy. I carried him a little differently and I knew what to expect. Energy the first trimester was definitely a little lower than with the first pregnancy and I was slightly more nauseous, but I had no migraines. Also with the second baby, I continued running through nine and a half months. I ran the whole time because it felt fine. On the other hand, pull-ups were a lot harder. Who knows — maybe the way I carried him. I followed the same rules — no 1Rmax, no PRs, made sure I could talk during the workouts. I felt OK.

That first trimester was hard because I was feeling really good. I was feeling strong. So it was hard NOT to lift heavy weights. But I tried to not do that because of the bearing down. But I did the squats — didn't learn my lesson there! I squatted below parallel with light weight and had an inguinal hernia. As soon as I gave birth, it was gone. It may not have been because of the squatting, but it hurt and it's probably worth it to stop squatting below parallel, even with weights that feel light to you.

The labor was much shorter and easier with my second baby, Israel. I was working out on a Saturday morning and my belly felt a little tight. By that evening I was having contractions and by Sunday afternoon I had the baby. No epidural and it actually took me a little longer. I had a hard time pushing for whatever reason, and he was smaller, at 6 lbs 14 oz. But there was no tear and I recovered from it much quicker.

At two weeks postpartum, I was back in the gym with very modified workouts at first — rowing and push-ups but no running — not a ton of stuff. Some days, getting the three of us out the door in the morning was brutally hard, but it was worth every effort mentally and physically to get out and interact with people older than two and find the support that came with being next to women who had gone through it.

Annie Sakamoto

TARA

In 1997, my husband, Nick, and I started training with Greg Glassman, who, in the very beginning, was using a space at Spa Fitness for CrossFit.

My First Pregnancy

When I first became pregnant, I had been training once a week. The other four days of the week Nick and I would do a CrossFit workout that we previously had done with Greg. Our training schedule did not change. Unfortunately, I miscarried at 12 weeks, at a time when the placenta is in the process of attaching to the uterine wall.

My Second Pregnancy

In 2003 I had been with CrossFit for 6 years and was pregnant the second time. CrossFit had just moved from a Jiu-Jitsu gym to Research Park Drive in Soquel and Greg and Lauren were still doing personals. The first three months I didn't train because of such bad nausea. I vomited most of the days.

Weight gain. I believe I was the first pregnant client Greg had trained. And of course the first thing he said to me was to make sure I didn't gain more than 30 lbs or I would NEVER loose the weight! So, of course I was paranoid but couldn't seem to control the weight gain. In the end I gained about 40 lbs. It could have been more, but I stopped looking!

Handstands and the GHD. Greg kept me doing almost all exercises and I felt good. I continued to do handstands and GHD sit-ups and worked on Greg's special ab bench made to his specifications by Nick Massman. It definitely had a different "feel" to it; weight could be added and you were semi-reclining. There's a photo of it in the Sept 2002 issue of CrossFit J (1), page 8. After seven-months I became very fearful of being inverted for the handstand. I really should have stopped doing them. In the end, the baby had to be turned from her breech presentation. This may or may not have been related to my handstands. I ended up with a very large (about 2") abdominal separation. But in the end it felt great to continue to workout during my pregnancy.

Postpartum. After Carmella was born I didn't get back to CrossFit until about eight-weeks postpartum. I had carried Carmella very low and needed to have my hips adjusted. I was still very weak and needed to take it easy. I was breast feeding and they were huge. I just did not know what to do! I wore two jog bras (something I heard other women talk about, but honestly, I thought they were making it up!). One day Greg politely said, while I was trying to jump rope: "Sweetie, why don't you skip this." I also tripped one day while running in the dark and ended up with road rash on the poor things. I had to be peeled off the street by poor Dave Leys.

The other thing that was big at that time was Nicole's quest with the Zone Diet. Again, being a new mom, the big thing was losing that baby weight! So I went on the classic CrossFit Zone and Nicole was my leader. Well, I fell in love with it! I lost all this weight, felt great and you know what? I was weak as sauce! I was pretty much starving myself into a size 0!

My Third Pregnancy

For this third pregnancy, Carmella was about 1 ½ and I was my own coach. Again, I was sick for most of the pregnancy, but I was comfortable enough to just excuse myself and vomit during my workouts. Now, not being on the Zone, I started to feel stronger. I also carried Rocco differently from Carmella. The little space cadet was all in the tummy, so I had a lot more leg strength. I continued to do everything, including rope climbs, until I started getting rope burns on my belly. I did not do handstands (no need to and, as before, I feared being inverted) and I skipped the GHD's. I did do a little AbMat in the beginning. I was able to workout until almost the end.

I returned to workouts two-weeks after Rocco was born. I felt strong and had a great experience – the opposite from my time with Carmella's birth. I think the knowledge I had the second time around was the key. Building strength was the key to my great gains in CrossFit WOD's. However, here is where I ended up overtraining. This was after I started to build strength, then started hitting CrossFit WOD's hard five days a week. I needed to recoup and was forewarned by Eva, but it did end up taking me about a year. I also left the Zone and just ate clean — basically Paleo. I wanted to lose the baby fat again, but had a different perspective. I wanted to get strong, and healthy, not thin and weak. What was the point of that? So, Eva and I began and continue to build strength.

As a trainer, I want my clients who are pregnant to feel good. I want them to keep moving and be happy! They should enjoy that baby when it arrives and focus on building strength after. I fear for the new moms who want that "sexy-cardio" and end up without the energy to enjoy their new baby!

Tara Muccilli, CrossFit Trainer and Mom

JENNIFER

My name is Jennifer Cockerill and I work out at CrossFit Santa Cruz. I worked out throughout my entire pregnancy, well, until 1 month before my baby was born.

I started CrossFit with Hollis and Danielle about a month before I became pregnant. Throughout my pregnancy I went to CrossFit 3 days a week until the last month. I became more fit than I'd been in years. I'm amazed at what I was able to do while I was pregnant. After every work-out I felt fantastic which is what kept me going. I discussed doing CrossFit with my doctor and she supported my choice (she had recently had another patient who did CrossFit so she was familiar with it.) I followed her basic guidelines: Stay hydrated; make sure I can talk while working out (keep the heart rate down); and stop if I have any bleeding. I never had any problems apart from some Braxton Hicks contractions here and there. If an exercise didn't feel right I'd just stop, let Danielle or Hollis know, and they'd come up with modifications for me.

The reason why I stopped a month before my daughter was born is that she dropped down super low and my doctor thought she'd come at any time. I was extremely uncomfortable and I only felt walking was appropriate at that point. But...everyone is different. That is what worked for me.

The hardest part of working out while pregnant was that almost **EVERYONE** I talked to said I shouldn't do it. Being new to CrossFit made this lack of support even more difficult. But as the months went by, I continued to feel fantastic while working out so I kept up with it.

Jennifer Cockerill CFSC

ONE FIT MOM

Hi, I'm Carli! I am a 33 year old mom and fitness/nutrition enthusiast living in beautiful Vancouver, Canada.

<http://onefitmom.ca/2011/02/17/pregnancy-myth-2-no-heavy-lifting/>