GUIDE

In your first month of CrossFit, the next class matters more than the order of the work.

The warning that cardio cancels strength gains was measured in experienced lifters. For a beginner, the number that matters belongs to the next class.

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If you have read about training before a first CrossFit class, you have probably met the warning: doing cardio and weights together blunts your strength. It has a name, the interference effect, and the research behind it is better than most gym advice. Read for who was studied and what was measured, that research points a beginner at a plainer question than which half of the hour comes first.

Adding conditioning to lifting does not cancel strength gains

A conditioning piece after lifting costs no measurable strength, power or muscle, according to the largest pooled evidence so far. On October 14, 2026, The Conversation reported on a 2026 review in Sports Medicine that pooled 17 earlier analyses covering 144 studies: adding cardio to weight training improved aerobic fitness without costing strength, power or muscle. A 2022 review of 43 studies and 1,090 people had already reached the same place, whether the cardio was cycling or running.

The same reporting is clear about the limit. A short cardio finisher is not a shortcut to bigger strength gains. Combining the two improves fitness on two fronts at once; it does not multiply either one. Strength and conditioning in one session is not a trade where one quietly pays for the other.

The interference effect showed up in trained lifters, not beginners

The interference effect, where endurance work holds back strength gains, is real, and it belongs to people who already train. A 2021 systematic review in Sports Medicine by Henrik Petré and colleagues pooled 27 studies of lower body strength, measured as squat and leg press one rep max, and split participants by training history. Combining endurance and resistance training reduced strength gains in trained people. In untrained people the difference was effectively zero, and in moderately trained people it was small and not statistically clear.

The definitions decide whether the warning applies to you. Untrained meant no regular physical activity for at least three months. Moderately trained meant active, but without a structured training program for three months. Trained meant athletes, or people who had followed structured training for at least three months. Most people starting CrossFit sit in the first two groups.

The Petré review also found the strength cost was larger when both kinds of training happened in the same session, and The Conversation reports that the cost in experienced lifters appeared only in that same session setup. That is the specific situation the warning was built on: an experienced lifter, one session, chasing maximal leg strength.

Exercise order adjusts a strength gain. Attendance decides whether there is one.

The best evidence that order matters comes from Northumbria University, and it was measured in people much like beginners. Eddens, van Someren and Howatson pooled ten studies of 245 healthy adults, six of those studies in untrained people and three in recreationally active ones, and found that lifting before endurance work gave about 7% more gain in lower body dynamic strength than the reverse. That finding holds up, and the advice it supports is simple: lift first.

Now look at what the 7% was measured on. Every one of those 245 people was tested after a program of 5 to 24 weeks, and the 7% is the difference between two groups who both completed that program. The same is true at scale. The 144 studies behind the 2026 review and the 27 behind the Petré review measured strength after weeks of scheduled sessions, because a training study has no other way to measure anything.

Set the two side by side. Lifting first instead of conditioning first: about 7% more leg strength gain, after five weeks or more of training. Attending those five weeks instead of stopping after one: the difference between that gain and none, because no group in any of these reviews improved on sessions it did not do. Order adjusts the size of a gain. Attendance decides whether a gain exists.

In month one the 7% is already handled, and it would not show if it were not. A CrossFit class puts the strength piece first, and each person works at a load that suits them, which in a first class is often an empty bar or a light dumbbell. A maximal lift is months away for somebody learning to squat. A perfectly sequenced hour done once does less than an ordinary hour done twice a week for a month.

The decision a beginner actually controls is the next one. If you came on Monday, what would make Thursday feel possible?

The strongest case against: the beginner exemption is thinner than it sounds

The case against lifting and conditioning in one session is that beginners are not as exempt from interference as the headline suggests, and three findings carry it. The moderately trained group in the Petré review showed a small negative trend that missed statistical significance, and a trend that misses is not the same as no effect. A 2022 review by Schumann and colleagues, covering healthy adults in studies classed as either sedentary or active, found explosive strength, the kind used to jump or sprint,

improved slightly less when cardio was added, and the dip was more pronounced in the same session; The Conversation places it within 20 minutes of each other. Those were ordinary adults, so this objection does reach beginners. And most of these studies used cycling or running, not the mixed, intense intervals of a CrossFit conditioning piece.

A fourth point sits under those three: nobody stays a beginner. After a few months of regular classes, a person crosses the Petré review's own line into trained, which is exactly the group where interference appeared.

None of the four changes month one. The explosive strength dip and the moderately trained trend are small effects on jumps and maximal lifts, and a person in their first month is learning to squat, not testing a one rep max. The gap between study cardio and class conditioning cuts both ways: the evidence does not prove a class is costless, and it does not show a cost either. Becoming trained is the best of the four objections, which is why it belongs in the plan rather than in the fear. Once somebody has trained for months and decides maximal strength is their priority, separating sessions or adding a strength focused day is a reasonable conversation with a coach. That is a good problem, and it only arrives for people who kept coming.

A combined strength and conditioning class does not suit every goal

An experienced lifter whose main goal is the biggest possible squat or deadlift is better served by separate strength days than by a combined strength and conditioning class. That lifter belongs to the group where same session interference actually showed up. Somebody preparing for a long endurance event needs more steady aerobic work than a short conditioning piece provides; The Conversation's own conclusion is that a finisher does not replace dedicated cardio across the week.

Anyone who has been given limits by their own doctor or physical therapist should treat those limits as the plan and fit the class inside them, not the other way round. For everyone else who is interested and slightly put off, the evidence supports a plain conclusion: lifting and then conditioning in the same hour is a reasonable way to start, not a compromise to manage.

> Order adjusts the size of a gain. Attendance decides whether a gain exists.

The interference effect is worth knowing about, and in time it may become worth planning around. In month one it is a finding about other people. The thing worth planning around now is smaller and more personal: finish the first class able to picture the second one, then go to it.

Further reading

1. The Conversation, Liam T. Pearson-Noseworthy (Northumbria University), reporting the 2026 Sports Medicine review of 17 analyses and 144 studies, the beginner versus experienced lifter split, the 20 minute explosive strength dip and the lift first finding theconversation.com/doing-a-short-cardio-session-after-weight-training
2. Petré, Hemmingsson, Rosdahl and Psilander, Sports Medicine systematic review and meta-analysis of 27 studies: the primary document for the finding that strength interference appeared in trained but not untrained or moderately trained individuals, and was larger in same session training pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8053170
3. Eddens, van Someren and Howatson (Northumbria University), Sports Medicine systematic review and meta-analysis of intra-session exercise order: the primary document for the roughly 7% lower body dynamic strength advantage of lifting first, measured in 245 healthy adults, mostly untrained or recreationally active, over programs of 5 to 24 weeks pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5752732
4. Schumann and colleagues, Sports Medicine updated systematic review and meta-analysis of concurrent aerobic and strength training: the primary document for the explosive strength dip in same session training, measured in healthy adults classed as sedentary or active, in supervised programs of at least 4 weeks pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8891239

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