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# James Crossley (aka Hunter the Gladiator): my 40 fitness tips for the over-40s



James Crossley is now a personal fitness trainer



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By **Robbie Hodges**

22 FEBRUARY 2017 • 11:44AM

**V**oid of the slicked blonde hair and searing tan that made women of the 90's swoon, you probably wouldn't recognise James 'Hunter' Crossley (<https://twitter.com/mrjamescrossley?lang=en>) if you passed him in the street. Towering at 6'3", and wide – so wide you can imagine he often has to dislodge himself from doorways – the ex-Gladiators star boasts a colossal build that's been 31 years in the making.

It all started with a marathon session of watching Rocky films, aged 12. From that point Crossley set forth on a goal-based fitness journey: with every year he aged, he'd gain a stone and add an inch to his arm circumference.

His moment of fame came aged 19, when Crossley – now sporting a whopping 19-inch arm and 19 stone's worth of muscle mass – was invited to take to the ring as Hunter in one of the most-watched TV shows of the 90's (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/i-won-gladiators-in-the-1990s---now-im-professional-athlete/>). He ditched the inch-a-year vow and instead threw himself into the all-action series, which ran on British TV from 1992 to 2000. A spate of acting jobs and a US tour with the Peter Hall company followed.





Hunter greets members of the military at the Royal Tournament CREDIT: RICHARD WATT

However, Crossley says that throughout this period in the limelight, fitness remained his priority. He recalls having a purpose-built gym installed underneath the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles in which he would dead-lift to the rousing soliloquies of co-stars Rebecca Hall and Dan Stevens.

Then, in 2012, Crossley swapped his jazz shoes for trainers and established his own gym franchise, Chelsea Fitness. Now 43, he is determined to help over-40s get in shape. Family obligations, work pressures, aches and pains: there are no excuses for poor health. “The key”, Crossley says, “is to make sustainable life changes, not to seek quick fixes”.

‘Hunter’ might not seem like the name of a man familiar with delayed gratification but Crossley certainly knows what he’s talking about. Below, he presents his tips for those looking to get fit at forty.

## 1. Have a medical

“When you’re over forty,” says Crossley, “you can arrange to have a medical check-up for free on the NHS. They’ll run a range of tests and give you feedback specific to your body’s needs.”

## 2. Evaluate your current condition

“It’s important to be honest with yourself; test your limits but don’t push them. Can you do a squat? Can you a run a mile? Or can you not even tie your shoelace? You need to know what stage you’re at before you start pushing your body.”



### 3. Make definite goals.

“I’m very goal orientated, which I think is very important when anyone is training or transforming their body. A race, an event, or maybe a specific weight-level: having something to work towards will help when your motivation lulls.”

### 4. Warm-up is key

“Instead of brushing over, it needs to be part of your plan. It’s important to mobilise and stimulate your muscles before engaging in heavy exercise, especially as you get older.”

### 5. Perfect exercise form is essential

“You need to extend fully, no half-range motion.”

### 6. Slow your tempo down

“When you’re younger, you lift heavy weights as quickly as possible. When you’re older you want to be slow and deliberate to avoid causing any damage. If you’ve got any shoulder problems or back problems you’re only going to cause more damage.”

### 7. More recovery time

“You need more recovery when you’re over 40 than when you’re 20, so if you’re training hard, make sure you still have the recovery days. It doesn’t mean you can’t do something on these days. You could still do a speed walk but you don’t want to be hammering the weights everyday.”





## 8. Find activities you enjoy

“It’s the best way to ensure that you keep at your fitness plan.”

## 9. Do a bit of everything

“Combine strength-training with flexibility and cardio.”

## 10. Keep exercise varied

“If you do the same exercises every week, your body can get stuck at certain planes. Every six weeks I’d suggest changing up your routine.

"They say as a kid you should play a variety of different sports so you’re strengthening many different muscles. That shouldn’t stop as you enter middle-age.”

## 11. Look at exercise as a priority

“So many people will choose to go to the pub or will use their family as an excuse to skip the gym. You’ve got to prioritise exercise and fit it into your schedule.”

## 12. Make people accountable

“Find a gym buddy and hold each other accountable. If you plan to meet a friend at the gym at 6am, you’re far less likely to flake and have a lay in. Likewise, if you’ve booked a squash court or a gym



class in advance, you're more likely to actually workout as you've made that commitment in advance."



mrjamescrossley  
The Foundry

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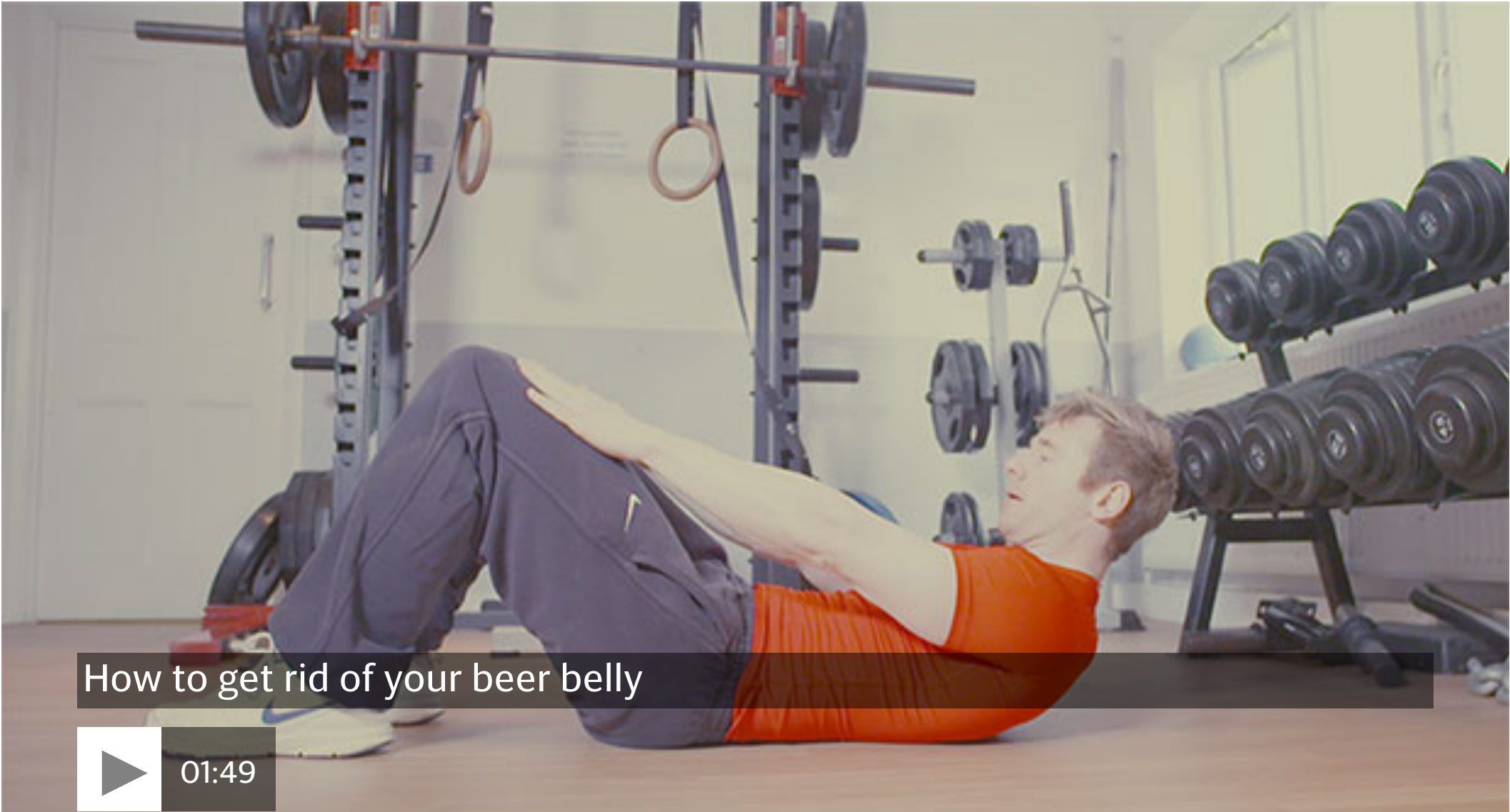
### 13. Make it sociable

"Keeping on top of your fitness doesn't have to be a chore. If you go to the gym with your friends a couple of times a week, why not grab a drink afterwards every now and again? You've got to be kind to yourself."

### 14. Watch the booze

"Beer is dead calories. You go out on a Friday, before you know it you've drunk 4 beers and that's 1,000 calories. You've got to burn through that before you burn through your food before you burn through body fat, so if you're looking to burn fat, steer clear of the lager."

"A glass of red wine – which is full of antioxidants – before you go to bed, that's great. But the binge-drinking can be a problem."





## 15. Limit your carbs

“Your metabolism slows as you get older so you haven’t got the same ability to eat carbs without putting a bit of weight on. I’m not saying don’t eat carbs, I’m just saying be aware of them. You can still get energy from fats and protein but you’ve just got to be aware of your carbs after forty.”

## 16. Drink more water

“You’ve got to stay hydrated. The body’s 70pc water so if you don’t drink enough you won’t be working efficiently. Teas and coffees dehydrate you so don’t fall into the trap of consuming all of your water intake through hot drinks”.

## 17. Get 7 to 8 hours sleep

“Sleep is when you recover and most middle-aged people are chronically tired. The trouble is, as you get older, your sleep can be a bit more broken so you’ve just got to treasure it a little bit and wind down before you go to bed.”

## 18. Get some black out curtains

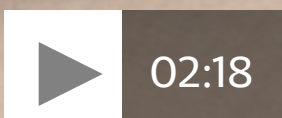
“Make sure your bedroom is a place to sleep. Don’t just get black out curtains but turn off your phone and your tablet. LED screens can really diminish your quality of sleep.”

## 19. Meditate

“At night your brain is racing, you’re thinking about work tomorrow and little tasks that you have to do. Meditation is about getting yourself in a calm space to help you sleep.”



How to practice bedtime meditation



## 20. Take Epsom salt baths.

“Epsom salt is rich in magnesium, which is proven to relax people when stressed. It’s best absorbed through the skin. I often take Epsom salt baths in the evening before I meditate.”

## 21. Eat organic foods

“Organic food just hasn’t been tampered with so much. It’s more expensive but it’s worth it.”

## 22. Try to watch less TV

“I’m not saying cut out TV but you can get into a habit of zonking out. I’ve worked with people in the past who would come in from work, they’d open a beer and they’d just sit there for four hours. Easy to do.

"Those hours are the hours you should be prioritising exercise.”

## 23. Eat more protein

“When most people write down what they’ve eaten for three days, its 80pc carbs. Protein helps your body repair, it’s what your body really needs. As carnivores, we need protein in every meal.”



Steak, glorious steak



## 24. Stay away from sweeteners

“It’s alright thinking, oh I’m eating a sweetener, it’s not really sugar, but you’re still getting an insulin kick which is not great. You should aim to keep your insulin level stable; sweeteners create imbalance.”

## 25. Increase your fibre.

“Pack your diet with vegetables, you can’t have too many.”

## 26. Watch the dairy

“70pc of us can’t digest dairy products. It’s the pasteurisation process that’s the killer. You’re better drinking almond milk than you are drinking milk.”

## 27. Green tea

“Green tea is filled with antioxidants and can bolster fat loss. It’s also far less caffeinated than breakfast tea as well as being dairy-free.

"If you have multiple cups of tea a day, why not swap one of your cups of tea a day for a mug of green tea. You’d be surprised at how quickly you can break old habits.”

## 28. Increase smart fats.

“Smart fats, like those found in avocado and coconut oil, are a bit more essential as you get older.”

## 29. Be sensible with desserts

“The older generation have often been brought up to always have dessert and that’s the dish that can really rack the calories up. Greek yoghurt is a good substitute.”



**James Crossley**   
@MrJamesCrossley

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## 30. Eat off a smaller plate

“We’ve all been brought up to finish our plate – no leaving the table before you've finished.

Serve your dinner on a smaller plate and you’ll trick your brain into thinking you’ve eaten a full meal.”

## 31. Use apple cider vinegar as dressing

“It’s very good at breaking down fats and has been proven to lower blood-sugar levels.

"Get rid of your caesar dressing and replace it with apple cider vinegar.”

## 32. Try fasted cardio



“If you go for a run first thing in the morning then there’s nothing in you. So have a black coffee, get the metabolism going, and then set off. You’ll be in a fat burning-zone within about four minutes.

"It’s all about kickstarting the fat-burning process.”

### 33. Take the stairs instead of the lift

“You can always opt out of a lift or escalator. Little changes like this make all the difference.”

### 34. Get off a train stop early

“Set off ten minutes earlier and enjoy the walk. Again, this is a simple choice you can make every day that, over a long period of time, will make a big difference.”

### 35. Take up yoga

“Especially when you’re over 40, you start getting very tight, lower-back muscles. I meet middle-aged people whose muscles are so tight that they can barely reach down to tie their shoelaces.

"Yoga is great for mobility. I work out four days a work and always go to a yoga class once a week.

### 36. Add supplements

“You think you’re getting loads of vitamins with your food but it’s often been heavily processed. It’s just a means of insurance. I take Omega 3, zinc for vitality and magnesium to help my sleep.”

### 37. Take a probiotic

“It’s not about what you eat, it’s about what you absorb. Many people’s gut health isn’t great just from years of an abusive lifestyle. Some of my clients have suffered from 'leaky gut', which means that a lot of the protein they eat often goes unprocessed and leaks out of their gut. Probiotics help with the digestion process.”

### 38. Go swimming

“Swimming is just a good, low impact form of exercise. If you have joint issues, which a lot of people do, swimming is a good choice. Also with swimming you don’t have to get your heart rate as high to get in the fat-burning zone.”

### 39. Use a foam roller

“A foam roller is the one item of gym equipment I recommend everyone invests in. The fascia can get very tight around your lower-back muscles which restricts movement. A foam roller can really loosen this up. I bought one for my dad recently and he uses it all the time.”

### 40. Work postural muscles