

THE PERFECT SQUAT

THERE'S MORE TO SQUATTING THAN PUTTING A BAR ON YOUR BACK AND SITTING DOWN. THIS IS A TECHNICAL EXERCISE AND SLIGHT CHANGES TO YOUR TECHNIQUE ENABLE YOU TO ADD SERIOUS WEIGHT TO EACH SET. GOOD SQUAT MECHANICS ALSO CARRY OVER TO THE MAJORITY OF LOWER BODY EXERCISES SO YOU'LL SEE THE BENEFITS ACROSS THE BOARD. MULTIPLE WORLD, EUROPEAN AND BRITISH RECORD HOLDER POWERLIFTER SCOTT HALLIDAY GIVES US A MASTERCLASS IN SQUATTING.

THE OLYMPIC SQUAT

The foundations:

"A good squat relies on proper foot and body position from the set-up, which then continues throughout the lowering and lifting phases of the movement. Your feet should be slightly wider than hip width apart, with toes turned out a little (rather than turning the heels in). Keep your chest out, with the head up, eyes fixed on a point in front and above you (such as a point on the wall or where the ceiling and wall meet). Rest the bar on top of your shoulders, across the fleshy part of your upper back. Hold the bar outside your shoulders, with your elbows pointing down."

The descent:

"Take a deep breath into your chest and engage your core. Hold this breath as you push your butt back (known as the hip hinge) and bend your hips and knees. Your knees should remain in line with your toes so you may need to 'flare' your knees outwards slightly. This involves bringing an awareness to the outer thigh and rather than pushing the knees out, you resist them from coming inwards so they stay in line with the toes. Keep your eyes fixed on the same point, with your chest out, lowering until your hips and knees are parallel."

The lift:

"The bottom of the movement is known as 'the hole' and coming up from this point is arguably the hardest part of the exercise. To help keep your torso rigid, continue to hold the breath. Push through your heels, focusing on driving your chest upwards, exhaling when you are three-quarters of the way up. Engage your glutes at the top of the movement to fully extend the hips."



The view from behind:

"The bar should be level throughout the movement. The hips should also be level and centred at the bottom of the movement. There can be a tendency to shift the bodyweight to one side, usually to the dominant leg as a result of a strength imbalance or tightness on one side of the body. The heels should remain flat on the floor throughout."

THE PERFECT SQUAT

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GOOD FINISH

"Engaging the glutes and fully extending the hips at the top of the movement helps to prepare you for the next rep. Failing to do this makes the initial 'hip hinge' more difficult, putting you in a disadvantaged position where you rely on the lower back muscles to help you finish the movement, rather than the big hip extensor muscles (the glutes)."



THE VARIATIONS

SEMI-SUMO SQUAT

"This involves taking the feet slightly wider apart and turning the toes out a little more. The semi-sumo places more of an emphasis on the hamstrings and glutes, enabling a heavier weight to be shifted if these muscles are proportionately stronger than the quads – which are involved to a greater extent when the feet are closer together."



FRONT SQUAT

"The bar rests across the top of the chest and front of the shoulders, with the bar secured with arms crossed (as shown) or with the hands under the bar, just outside the shoulders with the elbows high (as in the catch phase of the Olympic clean exercise). The front squat can be used to help focus on keeping the chest up. Bend forwards too much and you'll feel the bar moving forwards off the shoulders."



SQUAT PROGRESSION TUTORIAL >>>

FIND A LOW BOX OR BENCH THAT WHEN SAT ON, PUTS YOU AT PARALLEL SQUAT DEPTH.

THE SQUAT TUTORIAL

ROCK & ROLL

“Stand just in front of the box, with your feet slightly wider than hip width, toes turned out and gaze held at the fixed point above and in front of you. Stick your butt back and bend your hips and knees to lower yourself onto the box, ‘flaring’ your knees as you do so. Rock back slightly then roll forwards, focusing on driving the chest upwards to return to standing. Perform sets of ten repetitions until you feel comfortable with this movement. Lower for a count of two and explode upwards with each rep.



“Later, when you add weight, the speed of the ascent will decrease but you should still focus on exploding upwards as this will help you get out of the ‘hole’. Move away from the box between each set. This helps you practice getting your feet in the right position. You should be able to get your feet set correctly without having to look down at them.”

TOUCH AND GO

“Set yourself up in front of the box as before. Lower yourself down and gently touch the box with your butt. As soon as you do so, explode upwards to return to the start. Perform sets of ten repetitions until you feel comfortable and are able to complete each with perfect form.”



TOUCH AND GO PROGRESSIONS

“Perform the same exercise holding a 10kg weight plate with arms across your chest. You will have already mastered the correct foot position, so adding the weight enables you to focus on keeping the chest up throughout the movement. From 10kg, progress to 15kg and finally the 20kg Olympic bar across your back.”



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