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Exercise The Right Way – The Back Squat

By Rick Mitchell

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Other articles in this series looked at a number of exercises, mainly from the perspective of developing a comprehensive muscle building program. Sometimes we take things for granted, especially when it comes to performing the basic exercises that constitute the core of most bodybuilders' training regimes.

It is useful, therefore, to describe in detail the processes involved in actually doing these exercises. This will help beginners to start out using the correct techniques before moving on to potentially more dangerous heavy weights. If it also helps more experienced lifters to redress some of the little faults that have almost imperceptibly crept in over the years, all the better.

In this article we'll take a close look at the back squat.

MUSCLES TARGETED: gluteus maximus, semimembranosus, semitendinosus, biceps femoris, vastus lateralis, vastus intermedius, vastus medialis, rectus femoris

STARTING POSITION

Grasp the bar with a closed pronated grip.
Step under the bar and position the feet parallel to each other.
Place the bar in a balanced position on the upper back and shoulders.
Hold the chest up and out.
Pull the scapulae toward each other.
Tilt the head slightly up.
Extend the knees and hips to lift the bar.
Take one or two steps.
Place the feet shoulder width apart, even with each other with the toes pointed slightly outward.
This is the starting point for all repetitions.

DOWNWARD MOVEMENT

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Allow the hips and knees to slowly flex.
Maintain a flat back, high elbows, with the chest up and out.
Keep the heels on the floor with the knees aligned over the feet.
Keep flexing the hips and knees until the thighs are parallel to the floor.

UPWARD MOVEMENT

Extend the hips and knees at the same rate.
Maintain a flat back, high elbows, with the chest up and out.
Keep the heels on the floor with the knees aligned over the feet.
Keep extending the hips and knees to return to the starting position.

Repeat or finish set.

Rick Mitchell is the creator of the bodybuildingadvisor.com website that provides guidance and information to athletes at all levels of bodybuilding experience. Go to

to learn

more about the issues covered in this article.

They Dont Know Squat!

By Keith Londrie

There seems to be much confusion amongst trainers and trainees as to whether squats should be performed all the way down or just half way. In most gyms today, a common instruction during squats, deadlifts, and lunges (as taught by many personal training organizations) is not to allow the knees to travel beyond the toes. Doing so will ultimately cause the destruction of your knees! I do not agree. There are certain instances where partial range of motion (ROM) is indicated, but for the most part, I teach people the full squat for the following reasons:

- * It is the most primitive movement pattern known to man; our ancestors used to perform many daily functions (i.e. harvesting, gathering, hunting, cooking, eating, etc.) in a full squat position.
- * Also, in case anyone hasn't noticed, we spend 40 weeks in the fetal position (which is basically a full squat) prior to entering this world – do we come out with bad knees?
- * We should strive to train in full ROM for each and every exercise. The squat is no exception.
- * Every exercise produces stress around a joint – the body then adapts to this stress.
- * Cocontraction of the quadriceps, hamstrings and gastrocnemius maintains integrity around the knee

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joint.

* Sheering and compressive forces do occur around the knee joint (as opposed to only sheering forces that occur in some open kinetic chain lower body exercises, such as the leg extension); however, the large contact area of the patella with the femoral groove (as knee flexion increases during the full squat) helps to dissipate compressive forces.

* Therefore, not only is the squat – as a closed chain exercise – considered a natural movement pattern with high functional carryover, but it is also a safe exercise if performed correctly (and that includes full ROM!)

* Drawer tests are performed at a knee angle of 90 degrees because there is a greater amount of laxity in the knee joint at that specific angle. So, does it make sense to only go down half way where you are most vulnerable especially when greater loads can be used (because you are much stronger in this partial ROM?)

* According to Ironman contributor, George Turner, the fulcrum moves to the knee joint in a parallel squat as opposed to the muscle belly of the quadriceps in a full squat.

* Think about it, if you constantly trained in a limited ROM, the likelihood of injury increases if one day you happen to squat beyond your trained ROM.

* Partial squats performed on a regular basis will decrease flexibility.

* There is a low incidence of lower back pain and knee injury in Aboriginal and Oriental societies which perform full squats on a regular basis.

* Even Olympic weight lifters who practice full squats have quite healthy knees compared to other athletes.

* Although you may find some research that indicates full squats as potentially harmful to the knees, only one study has ever proved this to be true. However, it was performed on a skeleton – the same results do not hold true with surrounding connective tissue. On the other hand, numerous studies show the benefits of full squats.

Unfortunately, many personal training certification courses are teaching half squats as a safe version suitable for all individuals and this has now become written in stone. God forbid that you deviate from this golden rule to do something that our bodies are meant to do! Read this carefully: squatting should be performed in a full ROM where the hamstrings make contact with the calves (so that no light can be seen passing through your legs at the bottom position.) It is okay for your knees to travel beyond the toes (just do not relax the knees in the bottom position.) In other words, keep the legs tight and try to stay as upright as possible throughout the exercise. So, next time some fitness instructor approaches you in the gym and advises not to go deep while squatting tell him/her that they don't know squat!

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Keith Londrie II is a recognized expert with muscle building. Please stop by his web site to learn more about building muscle.

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