

SQUAT PROGRESSIONS

What's the best squat for your clients?

The squat is a great exercise that should interest anyone looking to improve their performance, fitness and health.

When performed correctly, it makes people faster, stronger, builds muscle mass and helps with fat loss.

Because it is a multi-joint exercise that requires coordination through a large number of muscles, performing a squat requires practice and coaching. It isn't a movement that everyone is able to perform at first.

We've heard it before, but we are all different in regards to ability, strength, flexibility, limb length; the list goes on. Therefore, there will be certain types of squats that people find easier and which will suit their goals more than other types of squats.

I have listed a few different types of squats that help cater for all shapes, sizes and ability:

▽ Dumbbell/Kettlebell Goblet Squats

If you're new to squats and weightlifting, or you struggle using a barbell (BB), then the goblet squat is a good exercise to learn how to squat.

Hold a dumbbell (DB) or kettlebell (KB) at chest height, as demonstrated. Quite often people lean forward too much and therefore struggle with depth, even with light loads or just a bodyweight squat. The goblet squat helps you sit back into the squat and keeps your chest up, due the weight being held in front. The goblet squat can be performed with light loads and high reps (3-5 sets x 8-20 reps). It is a good exercise that can be used in circuit training and conditioning, and also doesn't require much equipment.

▽ Barbell Front Squats

Biomechanically, the barbell (BB) front squat is very similar to the goblet. Your torso remains upright due to the bar being positioned on the front of your shoulders, which moves your centre of gravity forward. The quads and anterior core are loaded more in the front squat compared to the back squat. There is no cheating in the front squat, you will drop the bar if your technique is not spot on. It also puts less force through the spine, and as such is more lower back friendly.

Front squatting when using a clean grip requires a lot of mobility through your ankles, wrists and upper body. This is an exercise to progress towards.



For tips on improving your front squat, check out my article in last month's issue ('5 Tips For Improving Your Front Squat'). If you regularly perform Olympic lifts then it's vital you have a proficient front squat, or you'll always struggle with your cleans. If you don't perform Olympic lifts and struggle with the front squat grip, try an alternative technique with straps, pictured.

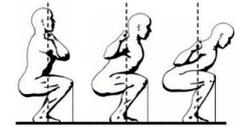


▽ Barbell Back Squat

The BB back squat is a hip-dominant exercise, more so than the front squat, and generally people can lift more on the back squat. There are two types of back squat, the high bar and the low bar back squat.

I would recommend trying both bar positions, and see which one works best for you and your clients.

This diagram illustrates how your centre of mass changes from the front squat to high bar back squats to low bar back squats.



The high bar back squat favours people who have shorter femurs and long torsos. In this squat, the bar is positioned on the top of the Trapezius muscle, as pictured, and is easier to squat more upright than the low bar back squat.



The low bar back squat favours people with long femurs and a short torso. This time the bar is positioned slightly lower down the upper back, on the spine of the scapula and on the posterior deltoids. The position of the bar means there is more of lean forward position at the bottom of the squat, which in turn loads the hips more than the high bar position.



To read more about how lower limb length can affect your squat, read the following article from Bret Contreras. SCAN the QR CODE, or visit www.bretcontreras.com/how-femur-length-effects-squat-mechanics

▷ Box Squats

A common fault in beginners when performing the BB back squat is that they fail to sit back into the squat and initiate the movement from the hips, with most of the movement happening at the knees. The box squat is great for teaching people to sit back into the squat and to hinge from the hip.

The box squat also puts less stress on the knees, and therefore can be performed on a regular basis without smashing up your knees.

During a box squat, make sure you keep the shins vertical, relax your quads and glutes, and squat down to just touch the box. This separates the eccentric phase from the concentric phase and teaches people how to load their hamstrings in their squat. You can also use the box to make sure you're hitting the right depth in your squat, so you don't end up doing partial range squats.





SCAN the QR CODE, or visit <https://youtu.be/8UnMQcVLQT4> for an example.



◁ Pause Squats

Pause squats are great for improving technique and strength at the bottom of the squat. The bottom of the squat, known as the hole to lifters, is where most people struggle with form. It is the toughest part of the squat, which people try to avoid like the plague.

If you want to become better at a lift, spend more time in the part the struggle with the most. Front and back squats can both be performed with a pause at the bottom. Pause squats are also great for teaching people how to brace their core at the bottom of the squat. Pause for anywhere between 3-8 secs at the bottom. Reduce the load by at least 20% of what you normally squat. The longer the pause the lower the number of reps, eg. 6 reps at 3 seconds, to 1 rep at 8 seconds.



◁ Sumo Back Squats

The feet are positioned wider than the hips in a sumo back squat. This turns the squat into a much more hip-dominant exercise, which loads the glutes and hamstring more than a conventional back squat. Similar to the low bar back squat, the shins should remain vertical throughout the movement.



Key coaching points for OH squats:

- Engage upper back, try and rip the bar apart.
- Make sure the head of the humerus sand does not pop out.
- Keep core engaged and sit back on your heels.

The key to coaching your clients to squat effectively is to select the right type of squat for their ability and their goals, with a clear idea of how to progress (increase load and difficulty) or regress the movement (decrease load and difficulty).

△ Overhead Squats

The overhead (OH) squat is the most technically demanding type of squat. If you lack mobility and stability anywhere in the body, it will show up in the OH squat. For this reason, I only train the OH squat with clients that have sufficient mobility through their shoulders, hips and ankle and/or are training for Olympic lifts (more specifically, the snatch).

Performed correctly, the OH squat is a great exercise. It is great for shoulder stability and strength, core stretch and lower body strength. Being able to perform a technically sound OH squat is a great long-term goal for yourself and your clients, but will take time to develop and get right.



Tom Mans has a degree in Sports and Exercise Science, is a certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS – NSCA), boxing coach and personal trainer. Follow Tom for more coaching and exercise tips: [@tommanspt](https://www.instagram.com/tommanspt) www.tommans.wordpress.com

Follow Tom for more coaching and exercise tips: [@tommanspt](https://www.instagram.com/tommanspt) www.tommans.wordpress.com