

Benefits of the Back Squat

- Total Body Exercise
- Ground Based
- Great for Developing Overall Strength
- Great for Developing Muscular Size
- Proper Performance can help prevent many injuries normally caused by weakness
- Helps athletes become better at “playing low”

Limitations to the Back Squat

- Athletes with prior injuries to the spine or knee may be limited
- Current lower extremity injury may rule the squat out of your exercise program
- Becoming technically proficient is time consuming

Teaching Progression

- Stance Basics
- Breathing
- Wall Squat (box)
- Wall Squat (with partner)
- Wall Squat (solo)
- Modified Front Squat
- How to hold the bar on your Back
- Back Squat

Stance Basics

- Begin with feet slightly wider than shoulder width – toes pointed slightly out
- “Spread the Floor” with your feet: if you were on ice, you would do the splits – this helps to keep your knees from buckling in during the movement
- Push through the heels, falling forward can put unnecessary strain on your spine – keeping your weight back keeps your center of gravity from falling forward and helps keep your knees behind your toes (more on this later)... try lifting your big toes slightly just before performing the movement



Breathing

- Always breath into your belly, not your chest – this helps promote internal stability around the spine
- Breath in at the top – now hold your breath on the way down and in the bottom position for a *split second* (unless you have high blood pressure)
- Once upward movement is initiated breath out as you stand up



Wall Squat (box)

- This series will help you learn to sit back rather than down when you squat as well as to keep your knees behind your toes
- Begin by setting an adjustable platform or low box near a wall – make sure it is sturdy enough to support your bodyweight!
- Set the platform such that as you sit on it the tops of your thighs are parallel with the floor
- From the seated position place your toes against the wall and assume your squat stance
- Take a breath into the belly, Spread the floor, lift your big toes and stand
- Try to sit back onto the platform without “plopping” down onto it and return to the standing position once again
- Once you can repeat this 2-3 times in a row without “plopping” down you are ready to move onto the next progression



Wall Squat (with partner)

- This time begin standing with your toes against the wall in your squat stance
- Breathe into the belly, spread the floor, lift the big toes, push your hips back and maintain a good arch in your spine
- You will notice that at $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down you will have to use your hip flexor muscles to pull you down
- This is where it gets tough! Your partner will have to spot you from behind and keep you from falling backwards – your partner's job is to push you forward enough so that you can pull yourself down to parallel you want to get used to your hip flexors working hard here!



Wall Squat (solo)

- Once you feel comfortable enough, try this without your partner
- Note that this is the exact form you will use with the bar on your back – you must master this exercise before moving on!
- You may pick this up right away, or you may have to practice 2 sets of 3 reps on this each day for as long as a couple of weeks to master it – either way, stay with it because it will pay you back down the road!



Modified Front Squat

- Once you have mastered the wall squat place an empty barbell across your shoulders and extend your arms out straight with your thumbs up to the ceiling and at eye level
- Now squat like you've been practicing against the wall: breath into the belly, spread the floor, lift the toes, push the hips back and maintain a great spinal arch
- The purpose of the bar here is to give you some feedback as to whether you are falling forward or not – if the bar rolls off your shoulders you are falling forward – check your weight distribution and keep working on it!
- Once you can do this for a set of 2-3 reps in a row you are ready to back squat!



Holding the Bar on your Back

- For the back squat, we want a “low bar position”
- To achieve this, squeeze your shoulder blades together *hard* – this will create a natural “shelf” for the bar to sit on... The “shelf” is your trapezius and rear deltoid muscles contracting – the bar will sit here comfortably without feeling like you are rubbing your spine with the bar
- Grip the bar firmly – experiment with the width of your hands for comfort – try to turn your wrists in... they won’t move very much, but by contracting your wrist muscles your wrists will hurt less from the awkwardness of the position
- Keep your eyes up and push your head back into the bar (like when you try to make your neck look bigger in your team photo)
- Note that this may feel uncomfortable at first... your wrists and upper back may not be strong enough initially to support much weight in this fashion, but **STICK WITH IT**, your upper back will grow thick with muscle from supporting weight in this manner – not to mention this is the most advantageous way to hold the bar (in time your spine will thank you)



Back Squat – Putting it all Together

- At this point, having mastered the previous progressions, the back squat should be a breeze
- Perform your practice sets with no more than 2 reps at a time with light weight until you get the hang of it (have a partner watch you!) and add weight slowly – in time you will have a healthy and impressive physique from all of your hard work!
- Remember:
 - Breath into the belly
 - Spread the floor
 - Lift the toes
 - Head back
 - Great arch
 - Drive through the heels!

