



SQUAT BASICS

All you need to know to master this fundamental training move

SQUAT BASICS: ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW TO MASTER THIS MOVE

By Emma Hogan for Fit Planet

Engaging all the major core and leg muscles, squats create simultaneous contraction of the power muscles responsible for vertical drive. Squats are ideal for lifting overall fitness, helping maximize fat burn and building strength in the lower body and core.

The muscles you work

Squats target your body's strongest muscles; the **Gluteus Maximus** (a.k.a. your butt) which is responsible for movement at the hip, and the **Quadriceps** and **Hamstrings** which work together to straighten and bend the legs. Squats also work the **Erector Spinae**, these are the long thin muscles that run up the vertebral column and are responsible for helping straighten the back.

Watch technical expert Corey Baird explain how your muscles work when you squat and what you should do to get the most from this fundamental exercise.

<https://youtu.be/EUlfDJjWwdk>

How to set up the perfect squat

- Place your feet slightly wider than your hips
- Position your feet with toe angled 5-20 degrees outward

- Lift your chest
- Ensure your weight is distributed through the heels and balls of your feet
- Brace your core muscles.

The movement

- Push your hips back and keep pushing them back as the knees begin to bend
- Ensure your knees track forward in line with the middle of each foot
- Keep your chest lifted
- Squat down until your knees are at 90 degrees
- Drive through your heels to return to standing
- Keep the core tight throughout the movement.

What to watch out for

- #1 Poor knee alignment influences the safety and effectiveness of the squat. If your knees rotate inwards, it compromises your ability to drive upward from the floor and can increase joint stress.
- #2 Foot positioning is critical. If your feet are too narrow, the femur will drive the hips back, causing the trunk to incline forward and placing pressure on the lower back. A wider stance allows the trunk to stay more upright throughout the squat action – reducing trunk fatigue and allowing increased recruitment of the gluteal muscles. People with longer femurs will often be more comfortable with a wider squat stance.
- #3 The lower the squat the more challenging it is to maintain core control, and the more likely it is that trunk positioning will be compromised. “To minimize any risk we encourage people to stop at 90 degrees at the hip and knee,” says Hastings. You can learn more about if you should do [full or partial squats](#) here.

Keen to push your limits?

Watch and learn how to take the intensity of your squats up a notch.

<https://youtu.be/SCxWDCO6JRs>

Three easy ways to increase the challenge of squats:

Weighted squats

Weighted squats are an ideal way to increase the challenge. You can choose to squat with a weighted bar on your back, front loading with a weighted bar on your chest, holding a weight plate at chest level or holding a plate low in front of your hips. By adding weight your quad muscles add extra load to your quad muscles

Squat presses

Squat presses are a sure-fire way increase intensity and raise your heart rate. Simply hold a barbell at the front of your chest, squat down and as your rise press the barbell above your head. You can also do this with a free weight plate.

Squat jumps

Squat jumps are what will send your heart rate through the roof. The important thing to remember is to keep your knees soft when you land. If you’re doing bodyweight squat jumps you can swing your arms for added momentum. If you’re holding a weight plate keep it low in front of your hips.

If you like the idea of squatting to smash hits give [BODYPUMP](#) or [LES MILLS GRIT](#) a go. Squats are also a regular feature in many other LES MILLS workouts too. You can find a class or work out On Demand.