

## Consider squats to improve function and longevity in sports and in life!

Squats are among the most beneficial movements we can do. Properly performed the squat will contribute to better function and therefore increased longevity. Ironically the squat is one of the most underutilized, misapplied, and poorly performed exercises. The primary reason for this is a lack of knowledge and experience when attempting to perform and/or teach the squat movement. Today we will begin laying the groundwork towards proper utilization, application, and performance of the squat movement.

Many useful variations of the exercise exist, but for today's discussion we will concentrate on the bodyweight squat. Three ways bodyweight squats can be performed are with the arms straight out to the front, with arms folded across the shoulders, or with the arms up and hands held loosely behind the head. Remember that if you can't do a correct bodyweight squat you have no business going to weighted squats! Our goal here is function; adding weight at the expense of poor technique will hinder proper function!

For application with general and athletic populations, the squat stance should be shoulder width. To find the proper width for your stance look at the width of your armpits. The distance between your armpits should equal the distance between your heels. If you have long legs relative to your shoulder width this may feel narrow. In this case try moving the feet wider one-inch at a time until a more comfortable position is found.

Considering the squat as a leg exercise is a common misconception. To meet our goal of improved function the squat should be approached as a full body movement that is dominated by the hips. As the true center of human movement, the hip should be the first joint involved in the squat. The knees should bend only after the hips begin the movement.

During the squat movement your weight should be distributed equally between the front and the back of the feet. If at any point during the squat you feel your weight transferring towards the front of your feet; you are shifting your center of gravity forward. There are a number of reasons for this; most often you have started the movement with the knees instead of at the hips. Always start the squat movement by breaking with the hips first. Another reason for your weight transferring forward is allowing the chest to drop down. Rounding of the shoulders then dropping of the head usually follows dropping the chest. Keep your chest up and the chin level.

The next points that prevent proper squat technique will be flexibility issues with regards to the hips, ankles, upper back and shoulders. Dealing with these issues will require outside assistance from a qualified therapist or trainer that understands and applies what is covered in this article.

Next month's subject: "squat depth"

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