FULL SQUAT

Technical points:

With your feet about hip width apart, toes facing forward and the tripod firmly rooted on the ground, align and elongate your body. Bend your knees as far as possible without lifting the heels off the ground or taking the weight off the heels. When you feel you can't bend your knees anymore while keeping the weight on the heels, keep your chest proud and abdominal muscles tensed and take your hips back, sitting down as if wanting to sit on a small nursery chair right underneath you. Look ahead at all times and try to keep the toes facing forward, while the knees track your feet (i.e. they don't buckle in or pushed out to the side). Once you are sitting down in the squat try to elongate your body and relax your shoulders. Stretching out the hand in front serves as counterbalance.



[Fig 16: Full Squat]

When you stand up it is important to keep your chest proud, abdominal muscles tensed and lifting the upper body first, the buttocks are underneath all the time, they do not lift first. Look ahead all the time, but without lifting your chin. Elongate your body, drop your shoulders, contract your abdominal muscles, lift your chest and look ahead as you stand back up, pushing through the tripod. About half way up clench (do not tuck) your buttocks. Imagine it's like a platform lifting you up from

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underneath together with the hamstrings. Tense your abdominal muscles and stand up slow, controlled and with an uninterrupted movement. When you move slowly you recruit all the muscles, you must; this makes the exercise more challenging.



[Fig 17: Full Squat]

Breathe out on the way down and on the way up.

Breathing out makes your belly button go inwards towards your spine (if you breathe correctly) and your abdominal muscles tense.

If your heels come off the ground place a wedge underneath them such as a stick or a thin book. As your ankles and hips mobilize and strengthen you will not need them anymore. You can also use an incline, your toes going down the slope. Avoid high wedges or steep slopes though, as it can overload the knees. You also want to make it somewhat challenging.

When standing on an incline or using a wedge pay close attention to body weight distribution. Do not shift your body weight away from the heels and onto the toes. Hold the pressure on the heels as you go up and down.

Notes:

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Using the stick example to explain the full squat:

Take a stick, break it in 2 pieces. Where the stick breaks are the hips. Top of the stick is the head and shoulders, bottom of the stick are is the knees.

When standing up the hips should move in between the shoulders and the knees.

The head, shoulders and the knees shouldn't move too much backward as one stands up, until the end. The hips lift everything up by wedging in between.

The Stick example to explain the squat

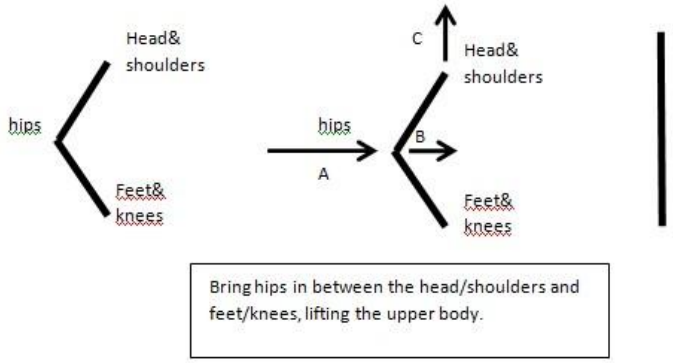

Fig 18: The Stick Example

Benefits:

Strengthening major stability muscles - quadriceps, gluteus maximum, hamstrings, core muscles.

Strengthening smaller joint stability muscles- feet, toes, ankles, knees, hips.

Strengthening foot arch which then helps reduce overpronation and certain foot, ankles and knees injuries. Your feet are your foundation. Everything begins from the roots. Weak stability muscles can lead to injuries in your knees and lower back. The full squat contributes to those strong foundations. It's one of the most natural movements.

Mobilising ankles, knees and hips as well stretching the back and glutes and it takes the joints through their full range of motion

Common errors and/or weaknesses to be aware of:

- Jerky movements. This may indicate muscle weakness at some point in the movement. They are most obvious when, at the bottom of the squat, there is a sudden drop and/or on the way up from the bottom until about half way.

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- Knees collapsing in or pushing out to the side, out of alignment. Again a possible indication of weakness or tightness.



[Fig 19: Full Squat]

- Placing more body weight on one leg than the other. This may indicate a weakness or injury on the side with less weight, muscles weakness or tightness.

- Slouching, rounding the back on the way down and/or up

- Buttocks are tucked in too much which rounds the lower back and causes the shoulders to round forwards as well. Buttocks should clench, not tuck. *Fig 20: Full Squat* shows a rather extreme example of this to give a clear imagine of how the back rounds when the buttocks tuck instead of clench.

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[Fig 20: Full Squat]

- Bum comes up first when standing up, knees straighten before hips come forward (see stick example). This could mean the glutes are not recruited properly on the way up and/or the abdominal muscles are not activated. The torso should lead the movement with chest proud.

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[Fig 21: Full Squat]

- On the way down in the squat sticking the buttocks out first. Ensure the knees bend first, while keeping the heels on the ground and weight on the tripods. When knees can't bend anymore then the buttocks move back. The idea is to squat as is sitting on a small nursery chair placed right behind the heels.

- Lifting the heels or the toes off the ground. Tripod should be firmly rooted on the ground at all times.

- Shifting the body weight on toes too much. In this case you can instruct to shift 51% of the body weight on the heels and it normally rebalances the weight distribution (explain why you request this).

- Pushing more on the toes when standing up instead of pushing or standing up through the heels. This is particular to individuals who cannot or do not know how to recruit the gluteus muscles. In this case you can perform the squat higher to help form the correct body awareness and bodyweight distribution and gradually strengthen the muscles which need to be used. You can also place 2 fingers on the side of the lower back and 2 fingers on the front of one of the the shoulders and slowly guide the movement and body position with your hands (do that on both sides of the body). This will help redistribute the body weight and help the client activate the correct muscles. You may notice that as you use the former technique your clients can't stand up or struggle, this may indicate muscle weakness.

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- Looking down. As a general rule, the body follows the head and the head follows the eyes; where the eyes go the body follows.

- Lifting the chin up when standing up. Chest should be proud and chin stays in the same position relative to the chest; when standing up the chin is parallel to the ground.

- Toes pointing out and/or knees push out excessively or buckle in. For the purpose of developing a good alignment and body awareness ensure toes point forward and the knees track the feet, pointing neither inwards nor outwards, this way pronation and supination are minimised and, in time, corrected. Ensure feet are hip width apart.

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[Fig 22: Full Squat]

- Shoulders shrugging. You may instruct clients to drop their shoulders, make space between the ears and the shoulders, sink their shoulder blades, lift the chest proud or any other form of instruction which the client is receptive to (you need to figure out how your clients receive and interpret information for you to be effective).

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