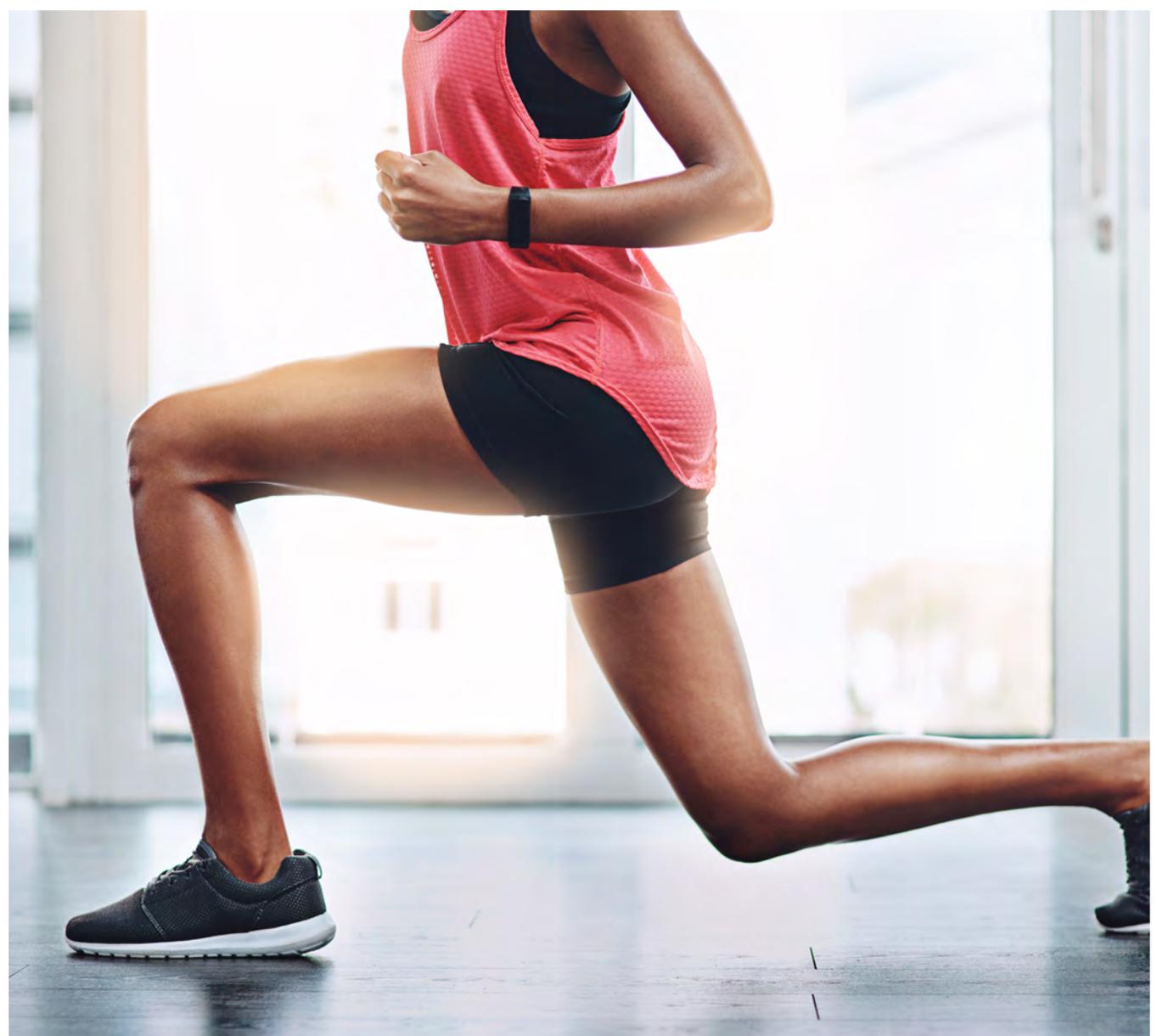


Minimalist Leg Day

A 6-WEEK PROGRAM FOR POWER & PERFORMANCE



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Josh Bryant is a world-renowned strength coach. He was a record-setting powerlifter strength athlete and has coached multiple world record holders in various strength events. Recently, by demand, Josh has transitioned into working with tactical athletes. Josh is a best-selling author and gives seminars around the world.

Building Power and Performance



When it comes to speed, strength, and performance, heredity deals the cards and your training plays the hand! Here, you can learn how to play that hand to build better leg-day performance. All that is required is a barbell, squat rack, possibly a resistance band, and, most importantly, your effort and commitment for the next six weeks!

Strength Base

The base for speed, agility, and even aesthetics is strength. The closer you can get to a 2.5-times bodyweight squat or deadlift, the better chance you have of maximizing speed, agility, and muscular development.

Not looking to get bigger? No problem.

You will not gain weight or excessively bulk unless you are in a caloric surplus. Strength is the universal requirement of all athletes in every sport. It is the ability to overcome external resistance. That resistance could be gravity, an opponent, required equipment, an implement, terrain, and countless other examples.

What about those with physique goals?

A holistic approach that requires this type of training is non-negotiable for maximum development. But keep in mind the following—training for strength torches fast-twitch muscle fiber and increases resilience to injuries. If you can squat 400 pounds for a one-repetition max (1RM) versus 150 pounds, you will be using a lot more weight for your sets of 10+ reps on squat, as well as being stronger on supplementary work like leg extensions that build the lower body.

Remember, this is for muscular development purposes. [Fast-twitch muscle fibers](#) are the largest, most powerful muscular movers in your body and have the most growth potential.

Fast-Twitch Recruitment

Your body recruits muscle fibers by the force demands you impose on it. So, when you're "slaying the iron" with heavy weight, using fewer than five reps on a [compound, strength-based movement](#) in a compensatory acceleration style, you are hammering fast-twitch fibers.

Bodybuilders with fast-twitch development have a denser, fuller look. Think of, for example, Branch Warren or Ronnie Coleman, who both started in powerlifting and routinely lifted heavy throughout their careers. Arnold Schwarzenegger also started as a powerlifter, as did many other bodybuilding greats.

Aside from heavy lifting, the other way to recruit fast-twitch fibers is explosive, high-force movements that require ample rates of force development. The two best examples are sprinting and jumping. In this program, we will be focusing on the lifting aspect.

Strength Without Size

For decades, many fitness publications have claimed that the only way to increase strength is by increasing muscle size (hypertrophy). In most cases, larger muscles can produce more force than smaller ones. But increasing muscle hypertrophy is just one option; this program offers you another.

Remember, if you are not in a caloric surplus, you won't gain weight, no matter how much you train. This leg program is designed to maximize your strength-to-bodyweight ratio, something that will help you in pretty much any sport or physical activity.

With the proper exercise selection and the matching exercise execution, you are programming your central nervous to recruit the appropriate motor units. This is neuromuscular control.

This trained efficiency is how you get stronger without gaining weight because you have programmed your body to recruit motor units more effectively. Strength is not only a quotient of muscle size but also the ability to effectively recruit motor units. This process is simply enhanced coordination or how you get stronger without getting bigger.

Speed

Generally, most people will get faster by default as their strength-to-bodyweight ratio improves in the squat or conventional deadlift up to a threshold of 2.5 times their bodyweight. Going beyond this point is unnecessary unless the goal is high-level competitive powerlifting. Of course, maximizing the strength-to-bodyweight ratio is paramount to success in any sport that has weight classes.

Strength Endurance

- This program is strength-based, but did you know that getting stronger will also improve your endurance?
- Improved neuromuscular efficiency means better movement economy or less energy wasted on seemingly unnecessary movement.
- Increased strength and power output means in activities like hill climbs, moving under load, or repetitive lifting, you are operating at a lower threshold of maximum power. Simply, if you deadlift 500 pounds, moving a 50-pound couch will require much less effort than if you deadlift 100 pounds; your endurance is improved because you expend less energy.
- Proper strength training helps you recover faster from injuries, prevent overuse injuries, and reduce muscular imbalances. This means more time can be spent training and thus endurance improves.

This minimalist leg day program will not win you the Boston Marathon, but it will certainly improve your conditioning in day-to-day and recreational activities.

Injury Prevention

[Injury prevention](#) is another aspect overlooked when examining the benefits of this type of strength training. If you strengthen weak and susceptible muscles, they are less likely to get injured. This could be the lower back, the hamstrings, or even the quadriceps (which control knee function).

Injury prevention will not increase your performance immediately, but it helps you have a more active life for longer; the more you can train uninterrupted, the better you will eventually perform. Additionally, the heavier core lifts help prevent injuries because they build protective muscle tissue and stimulate new bone growth.

You may be thinking this training is avoiding machines because it is a minimalist program—partially true but remember still waters run deep! The core/compound movements selected require you to display stability, motor control, force, and muscle stiffness, all while achieving a proper range of motion—pre-habilitation in action.

Free Weight Advantages

Free-weight compound movements offer many more advantages, since this program has the squat at its nucleus, let's compare it to the leg press.

Squats allow you to adjust your torso angle, bar placement, degree to which you sit down, and/or back. The leg press has a preset motor pattern determined by the manufacturer which may not be ideal for your body type. Few people would fall into what the manufacturer considers an average person.

Eight-time Mr. Olympia Ronnie Coleman's trainer and owner of Metroflex Gym, Brian Dobson, says in the iconic book *Metroflex Gym Powerbuilding Basics*, "My daughter can leg press 800 pounds, yet she struggles to squat 115." This is because the leg press requires no balance, the lower back and hips are not stabilized by the core of the body.

Because the stability factor has been eliminated with the leg press, the legs can lift poundage much greater than when trunk stabilization is a factor. This potentially puts the hips, lower back, and knees at an increased chance of injury because of the artificially heavy loads they are forced to handle.

Much like the squat, in sport, athletes are required to balance on their own two feet in turns, transferring ground force through the body. The leg press lacks this transference and has inferior intramuscular and intermuscular recruitment patterns.

There is a time and place to eliminate stability requirements and blast the muscles with machines to maximize muscular development. But, when it comes to performance, free weights reign supreme.

Unilateral Movements

Unilateral resistance training, one limb at a time, forces your body to recruit more muscle fibers than bilateral resistance training. Simply, much more effort is required for one limb, working by itself, to move a weight from one point to another, than two limbs working together to move the weight the same distance. The sum of the force that two independent limbs can produce being less than adding the maximum force together that one limb can produce is known as the bilateral deficit. Unilateral training takes advantage of the bilateral deficit.

[Unilateral exercises](#) require more balance than their bilateral counterparts. This requires greater activation of the core and stabilizer muscles. Most movement patterns require unilateral strength. Not to mention, how many people have one limb that is weaker than its counterpart? Most of us fall into this category.

Performing an exercise unilaterally is a great way to identify a specific weakness and imbalance. If you are doing an exercise using only your left arm, your right arm can't overcompensate and assist in balancing the weight and/or helping the lift.

The best example is the barbell bench press. If you are bench pressing with dumbbells and you cannot produce enough force with the right limb to overcome the weight of the right dumbbell, it will not go up. However, with a barbell bench, a strong limb can compensate for the weaker limb. After these weaknesses have been identified through unilateral exercises, you can take action to correct this.

Bilateral exercises are still the base and remain superior for developing limit/foundational training; unilateral movements tie up the loose ends that bilateral movements neglect. Using both types of exercises in concert produces a synergistic effect!

CAT

Compensatory Acceleration Training (CAT) is the idea to move lighter weights fast to not only build explosive strength but also induce many limit strength adaptations. Think back to Physics 101—force is mass x acceleration. In a squat, the mass is the barbell and your bodyweight, the acceleration, is how fast you move it.

Do not ignore the acceleration component! Your body adapts to the intent of your central nervous system (CNS), and you'll learn to move loads more explosively.

Looking at the squat's ascending strength curve, the greatest effort is required during the bottom portion of a rep. Thus, most trainees, upon getting out of the hole and moving to the halfway point of their range of motion, coast their way through the rest of the rep until lockout.

To maximize adaptations, as your leverage improves in this half-squat position, you need to go against this instinct and "compensate" by accelerating the weight. Doing so overloads the entire range of motion and greatly increases force output.

This doesn't mean going out of control.

“Slamming a weight to the end point of the range of motion certainly would cause injury,” says ISSA Co-Founder, the late Dr. Fred Hatfield, who is still recognized as the industry's foremost authority on CAT. “However, the learning curve associated with slowing the movement down just before lockout is very small. Anyone can learn to do this on the first try.”

Consider this example: performing a squat workout consisting of four sets of five reps at the same weight for each set. Assuming most people coast through with the least amount of effort required to complete a set, here is what you would get out of those four sets:

- Set 1 - None of the squats will be heavy enough to stimulate adaptive overload. Efficiency rating: 0 percent.
- Set 2 - Only the bottom half of the last rep will require enough effort for adaptive overload. Efficiency rating: 10 percent.
- Set 3 - The bottom half of the last two reps will provide adaptive overload. Efficiency rating: 20 percent.
- Set 4 - The bottom half of all five reps will produce adaptive overload. Efficiency rating: 50 percent.

This hypothetical session comprised 20 total repetitions, yet only eight halves produced the kind of overload that gets you stronger.

That's a 20 percent efficiency rating! If you show up to work 20 percent of the time, you will be looking for a new job quickly. Imagine what happens then over weeks, months, and years.

This CAT style is how you execute the specified core movements. Perform the negative with control and execute the positive with maximum acceleration and no sacrifice in technique. If you are unsure, slow it down to master the technique—the technique is non-negotiable.

Tempo

Tempo training is the brainchild of the late, revolutionary strength coach Charles Poliquin. Tempo defines the speed at which a repetition is executed. Exercise tempo is written in four numbers for example 4-0-X-1.

- The first number (4) is the eccentric, or lowering/yielding phase of a lift
- The second number (0) denotes any pause at the midpoint
- The third number (X) is the concentric or lifting phase
- The fourth number (1) denotes any pause at the top

Using the Romanian deadlift (RDL), as an example of 4-0-X-1, means beginning the movement with a four-second lowering phase, then no pause at the bottom of the lift, “X” means lift the weight as explosively as possible and finally pause the lift for one second at the top of the lift before beginning the next repetition.

It can be difficult to follow on heavy core exercises. On your supporting exercises, you are after a controlled cadence that allows you to properly feel the targeted muscles. Exercises will have a tempo prescription specified or need to be executed in a CAT fashion.

Walking

What about your off days? In addition to these workouts and the upper body training you are doing on your own, you can walk for active recovery.

For active recovery, walk for a maximum of 30-45 minutes, but even 15-20 minutes will do the job.

Walking benefits:

- Increase General Physical Preparedness (GPP)
- Decrease the Delayed Onset of Muscle Soreness (DOMS) from heavy workouts
- Increase heart health
- Decrease stress
- Helps maintain healthy joints/muscles
- Decrease body fat
- Increase energy levels

A few weekly walks can help keep you lean and mean and [keep your heart happily ticking](#).

Learn more about the science behind fitness with the [ISSA's Personal Trainer Certification](#). You'll gain the in-depth knowledge it takes to understand the body's muscle and skeletal structure and how they respond to exercise and movements. Provide current or future clients with customized training programs based on their individual health and fitness goals. Everything you need to learn is online and you can work through it at your own pace.

Minimalist Leg Day Program



UNIT TWO

Include two workouts a week, perform each of the prescribed workouts once weekly.

WEEK 1/DAY 1

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
SQUATS	1	3	75% of 1 RM		CAT
SPEED SQUATS	4	3	65% of 1 RM	90-180 sec	CAT
PAUSE SQUATS	1	5	65% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
1^{1/4} SQUATS	1	3	65% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
DEADLIFTS	12	1	70% of 1 RM	30 sec	CAT
LANDMINE RAINBOW	3	3	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	3-1-2-1

WEEK 1/DAY 2

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
LATERAL STEP-UPS	3	6	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
SINGLE-LEG RDL	3	5	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
NORDIC LEG CURLS	3	3	See notes	45-90 sec	4 sec negative
DROP LUNGES	3	4	Maximum with great technique	90-180 sec	3-1-2-1
SIDE PLANK	2	20 sec	See notes		N/A

WEEK 2/DAY 1

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
SQUATS	1	3	80% of 1 RM		CAT
SPEED SQUATS	5	3	65% of 1 RM	90-180 sec	CAT
PAUSE SQUATS	1	5	65% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
1^{1/4} SQUATS	1	3	65% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
DEADLIFTS	12	1	75% of 1 RM	30 sec	CAT
LANDMINE RAINBOW	3	3	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	3-1-2-1

WEEK 2/DAY 2

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
LATERAL STEP-UPS	3	6	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
SINGLE-LEG RDL	3	5	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
NORDIC LEG CURLS	3	3	See notes	45-90 sec	4 sec negative
DROP LUNGES	3	4	Maximum with great technique	90-180 sec	3-1-2-1
SIDE PLANK	2	20 sec	See notes		N/A

WEEK 3/DAY 1

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
SQUATS	1	3	85% of 1 RM		CAT
SPEED SQUATS	6	3	65% of 1 RM	90-180 sec	CAT
PAUSE SQUATS	1	5	65% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
1 ^{1/4} SQUATS	1	3	65% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
DEADLIFTS	10	1	80% of 1 RM	45 sec	CAT
LANDMINE RAINBOW	3	3	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	3-1-2-1

WEEK 3/DAY 2

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
LATERAL STEP-UPS	3	8	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
SINGLE-LEG RDL	3	6	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
NORDIC LEG CURLS	3	3	See notes	45-90 sec	5 sec negative
DROP LUNGES	3	4	Maximum with great technique	90-180 sec	3-1-2-1
SIDE PLANK	2	20 sec	See notes		N/A

WEEK 4/DAY 1

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
SQUATS	1	2	90% of 1 RM		CAT
SPEED SQUATS	5	3	70% of 1 RM	90-180 sec	CAT
PAUSE SQUATS	1	5	70% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
1 ^{1/4} SQUATS	1	3	70% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
DEADLIFTS	8	1	85% of 1 RM	60 sec	CAT
LANDMINE RAINBOW	3	3	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	3-1-2-1

WEEK 4/DAY 2

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
LATERAL STEP-UPS	3	10	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
SINGLE-LEG RDL	3	3	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
NORDIC LEG CURLS	3	4	See notes	45-90 sec	5 sec negative
DROP LUNGES	3	6	Maximum with great technique	90-180 sec	3-1-2-1
SIDE PLANK	2	20 sec	See notes		N/A

WEEK 5/DAY 1

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
SQUATS	1	2	95% of 1 RM		CAT
SPEED SQUATS	4	3	75% of 1 RM	90-180 sec	CAT
PAUSE SQUATS	1	3	75% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
1 ^{1/4} SQUATS	1	3	75% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
DEADLIFTS	6	1	90% of 1 RM	60 sec	CAT
LANDMINE RAINBOW	3	3	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	3-1-2-1

WEEK 5/DAY 2

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
LATERAL STEP-UPS	3	10	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
SINGLE-LEG RDL	3	3	Maximum with great technique	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
NORDIC LEG CURLS	3	4	See notes	45-90 sec	5 sec negative
DROP LUNGES	3	6	Maximum with great technique	90-180 sec	3-1-2-1
SIDE PLANK	2	20 sec	See notes		N/A

WEEK 6/DAY 1 (RELOAD WEEK)

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
SQUATS	3	3	70% of 1 RM	As need	CAT
PAUSE SQUATS	1	3	50% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
1 ^{1/4} SQUATS	1	3	50% of 1 RM	N/A	CAT
DEADLIFTS	6	1	65% of 1 RM	60 sec	CAT
LANDMINE RAINBOW	3	3	70% of last week	60-120 sec	3-1-2-1

WEEK 6/DAY 2 (RELOAD WEEK)

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS	INTENSITY	REST INTERVAL	TEMPO
LATERAL STEP-UPS	2	10	70% of last week	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
SINGLE-LEG RDL	3	3	70% of last week	60-120 sec	2-1-1-1
NORDIC LEG CURLS	2	4	See notes	45-90 sec	5 sec negative
DROP LUNGES	2	6	70% of last week	90-180 sec	3-1-2-1
SIDE PLANK	2	20 sec	See notes		N/A

Your Leg Day Exercises



Squats

[Squatting](#) for strength is an active squat. The lifter is forcefully firing their muscles to maintain stability, motor control, force, and muscle stiffness. This makes the muscles act as shock absorbers, relieving strain off the joints.

Start by squatting to a parallel depth. Compared to partial range of motion or passive squats, parallel squats maximize activation, muscle tension, internal fortitude, intramuscular tension, hypertrophic response, and safety. They also build limit strength and offer the best transference to field tasks.

For most, mobility will not be a problem; it will generally be a lack of motor control, stability, and tightness. As you gain this, the squat, through the ideal range of motion, will become more natural.

Squatting mechanics will vary some, person to person, and this is usually the argument for different depth prescription; it is based on variations in human anthropometry. The biggest differences are usually how much mobility someone has and their maximum range of motion—not their ideal squat depth. A clear majority will get their best results squatting to about parallel depth.

The goal is to squat upright but back angles will vary some from lifter to lifter. The optimal angle of your torso will depend on your structure. Someone with long femurs and a short torso will need more forward lean to achieve depth compared to someone with shorter femurs and a long torso who should be squatting much more upright. Despite trunk angle, it's essential to maintain a neutral spine squatting. The risk of injury greatly increases when the spine caves forward and rounds.

HIGH BAR VS LOW BAR

Most people will be comfortable with a “high bar” position, which is when the bar sits on top of their trapezius muscle. For some, this position allows a more upright position throughout the squat.

The “low bar” squat differs in the fact that the bar is placed two to three inches lower on their back, at the top of their rear deltoids. The low bar position has one distinct advantage because most people will be much stronger in this position and able to lift greater loads. Low bar squats mean more forward lean and hip flexion, the same amount of knee extension torque, and a fair amount more hip extension torque compared to high bar squats.

You can use either style—try both to figure out which works best for you or your clients. In general, people with shorter legs and longer torsos do better with high bar squats and those with longer legs and shorter torsos do better with a low bar position.

PAUSE SQUATS

These squats are executed the same way as a traditional squat, except you pause with the weight in the bottom position for one second. These squats build tremendous starting strength.

1 ¼ SQUATS

Start like a traditional squat but as you rebound out of the bottom of the squat, come up one-fourth of the way, then return to the bottom position and do a full squat; this is one rep. These build strong positioning and reactive strength and increase time under maximum tension.

Deadlifts

Try deadlifting as heavy as possible without the aid of weightlifting straps. If grip starts to limit you, do not use a mixed grip because it can greatly exacerbate the probability of a bicep tear and can cause asymmetries. Train using a hook grip or a double overhand grip with the aid of lifting straps so your posterior chain development is not limited by your grip.

There are many [deadlift variations](#). The two most common full range of motion deadlift exercises are the conventional and the sumo techniques. In the conventional deadlift, the feet are hip-width, the arms are just outside of legs, and the barbell is on the ground and lifted to a fully erect position. A conventional deadlift is a great option for this training.

The conventional deadlift is a true hinge movement—it uses your posterior chain to lift the load. For safety and efficiency, form is key. The closer you line up to the bar, the less stress on the lower back; this stress amplifies with every little bit the bar drifts away from you. Make sure you are braced in a flat back position. If you cannot hold the position, opt for rack pulls (partial deadlift in a power rack), trap bar deadlifts, sumo deadlifts, or kettlebell swings as a substitution.

Landmine Rainbow

This is an anti-rotational, core strength building movement. Place a barbell in a landmine rack or in the corner of the room where you are training. Start with just the bar. Stand in front of the end of the barbell and raise it above your head with both hands. While keeping your body stationary (do not pivot back and forth), move the barbell in a rainbow-like arc back and forth. Fight the direction the barbell wants to pull you to—stand your ground. Bend your elbows slightly (10 to 15 degrees) and do not rotate at the hips or shoulders. Stand tall through the entire movement.

Lateral Step-ups

This movement trains unilateral leg strength in the frontal plane, improves hip stability, and trains knee extension in a mechanically weak range. With the barbell on your back, place one foot on a box or bench. Using the elevated leg, while very minimally assisting with the other leg, push hard through the whole foot on the box to lift yourself to a standing position on the box. Step back down to starting position following the prescribed tempo, alternate sides. One rep on each side for unilateral movements counts as one rep.

The height of the step, for most people, will be between 12 and 24 inches. In a perfect world, the box will be a height that results in a 90-degree angle between your hip and knee joints. A lower box is easier, higher is harder, so keep this in mind if you cannot set up this angle.

Single-leg RDL

Like a conventional deadlift, a single-leg RDL is a [hinge movement](#). This unilateral move is difficult and often a favorite of world-class sprinters. While a barbell is noted here, using a kettlebell or dumbbell in each hand is also acceptable. Simply stand on one leg with the barbell in hand; from here, hinge your hips back while keeping a neutral spine. Do this until your torso is parallel or right above parallel to the floor; the barbell does not need to touch the floor. Return to the starting point for the prescribed number of reps, following the prescribed tempo.

Nordic Leg Curls

The Nordic leg curl involves kneeling on a pad (for knee comfort) and lowering yourself using your hamstrings under the prescribed tempo while your ankles are held in place by a loaded barbell, partner, or any other immovable object. Then, extend the hamstring muscles to lean forward; lean forward from your knees, not the hips. Focus on the negative portion of the movement; assistance can be done on the positive by pushing up with your hands. If this is too difficult, use a band to assist you.

Drop Lunges

This is a very difficult lunge variation; additionally, it is not a commonly used movement. The drop lunge differs from the other lunging movements because you begin the movement by standing on a two-to-four-inch elevated surface. This, in turn, boosts the eccentric stress on your quadriceps as you follow the prescribed tempo and lunge off the elevated surface.

Your foot will want to fall faster than normal—don't give in—stick to the tempo. Stop your knee a half-inch above the ground. If you are an advanced lifter, do this movement with a barbell on your back. If you are not, do it with just bodyweight. If you are still unsure, do a traditional lunge on the ground.

Side Planks

Do not load these or attempt to do them longer; the idea is to create maximum tension for the prescribed amount of time.

Cheers to Leg Day!

With this program, you will build yourself to be both mentally and physically stronger while also becoming more athletic and resilient to injury.

Take your expertise, training, and success up another level with ISSA's Elite Trainer program! You'll make more money by adding credentials that lead to higher hourly rates; you'll gain proficiency in new areas of fitness; and you'll be among the top in the fitness industry!

As an Elite Trainer you get:

- Personal Trainer Certification - Self-Guided Study Program
- Nutritionist Specialization
- Any advanced specialization