

Exercise of the week – Squats

Squats work the largest muscles in your body – legs and buttocks. They are great for burning calories, shaping your lower body and keeping you mobile in the hips, knees and ankles. Leg strength can help with lifting and carrying protecting your overused lower back.

Beginner

There are two squat stances. 1. Feet shoulder width apart, toes pointing forward 2. Feet slightly wider and toes turned out - often more comfortable for women due to their wider, flatter pelvis and the less flexible. In both your knees follow the same direction as your toes. Standing upright, activate your abdominals. Take a deep breath in and bend your knees as if you were going to sit down on a chair. When your thighs are parallel with the ground, squeeze your buttocks and slowly straighten up, breathing out.

Intermediate

Adding a 'pause' to the down phase of the movement increases the intensity and strengthens around the 'weak point' of bending – watch how an injured or elderly person can only bend under control to a certain point.

Perform 5 squats, on the 5th repetition hold in the down position and count to 5. If 'burning thighs' is likely to make you count faster, count "1 hippopotamus, 2 hippopotamus..." Perform 5 more up and down and another hold for 5 seconds.

Advanced

Standing on duradiscs creates an unstable base of support. On this surface, the shifts in posture and weight distribution unbalance you challenging your muscles. Place your feet in the centre of the duradiscs and perform squats as before. Your body will want to lean forward or back putting weight onto your toes or heels, try and keep your weight equally distributed.

*** All 3 levels can be performed holding a medicine ball, dumbbells or a barbell**