

Want to Squat Like a Man? Lift Like a Woman.

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Every day you can go into a weight room anywhere in the country and two things will be certain: 1) Men will be working their chest and arms, and 2) Women will be working their legs, specifically their gluteals and hips. Granted, the vast majority of these lifts are done for cosmetic reasons, but every once in a great while a pencil-legged man with 22-inch arms will decide to hop under the squat bar, Smith machine no doubt, to, you know, mix up his routine. This venture will more than likely be paired with seated calf raises, because we all know ladies like calves and he's starting to get a little self-conscious about his no. 2's. If he's feeling extra ambitious he may even throw in a few sets of hamstring curls, but only a half range of motion will be executed here in order to keep the weight higher than the next top-heavy pump addict looking to give his over-trained upper extremities a day's rest.

Inevitably the day will come when our subject will work up enough courage to attempt a barbell back squat. There are a couple scenarios that could play out from this point: he could load the bar up with significantly more weight than he is able to handle, leading to severe injury; or he could understand his limits and lift according to them, leading to severe weight room embarrassment. Oh wait, except that all of the other gym rats are squatting with that same pair of 45-pound plates.

How is this possible, that the back squat, the exercise that forces the greatest testosterone pump in the body, hits the greatest areas of muscle mass, and involves the most powerful muscles in the body is one of the most underutilized exercises in every gym in the country? Perhaps it is because in order to actually squat well you have to do many of the same exercises as the spandex-donning women that make your lifts twice as long, and twice as exhilarating, as they should be.

When it comes to squatting, the hamstrings and quadriceps are certainly involved. However, the lower body muscle groups that play the most important roles in squat execution are the muscle groups that men rarely, if ever, train to strengthen—the gluteals and the hip complex, specifically the hip adductors and hip abductors. The gluteal is our bodies' most powerful muscle as well as our number one hip extensor. However, through many decades of improper movement mechanics and sedentary lifestyles, the gluteals for most men are completely asleep, leading the hamstrings to take over the job as top hip extensor. This is a problem because our hamstrings are not designed to be even the number two hip extensor—this job goes to our adductor magnus—leading to countless hamstring injuries in men.

The other areas of much-needed work are the hip adductors and hip abductors. If you have trouble remembering which one is which, think of this: when your leg goes OUT from your body it is being ABducted, just like someone who is taken into OUTerspace is ABducted by aliens. So what exactly do these muscle groups do? Well, they do quite a bit, but when it comes to squatting they are primarily used to stabilize the knees and hips. Weaknesses in these muscles can be

easily identified by performing simple bodyweight squats—if you see that your knees bow out during the eccentric contraction (varus knees) then that means your ABductors are tight and your ADductors are weak. However, if your knees come towards each other during the eccentric contraction (valgus knees) then your ADductors are tight and your ABductors are weak. Different stretching exercises can be implemented to alleviate any tightness, and weakness in these muscle groups can be overcome through basic strength training exercises.

One of the best techniques for relieving tightness in these areas is Self-Miofascial Release (SMR), specifically the use of a foam roller. By simply laying on the roller such that the tight area is in contact with the roller and then using your bodyweight to massage the area the tightness in these muscle groups can be released. Something else to think about is that if your abductors are tight you should strongly consider rolling out your gluteus medius in addition to your IT band as that is a major component of hip abduction. While there are other forms of SMR, such as a tennis ball, it would be difficult to alleviate tightness in the abductor and adductor muscle groups with these tools, although a tennis ball can be very effective on the gluteus medius.

In addition to relieving tightness, strength training of the appropriate muscle groups should be implemented. One of the best pieces of equipment to use in order to strengthen the hip complex is the Multi Hip. You have undoubtedly seen this machine in your local fitness center, but have always walked by it en route to the bench. It's the machine with the platform and swinging arm that hangs down with the pad on it that rests right above your kneecap. There are usually a couple bars sitting perpendicular to the arm as well that you can hold on to. If this isn't jogging your memory then look for the area of the weight room where the women are gravitating. This piece of equipment is designed to specifically train your entire hip complex, making it ideal for someone who is needing a lower-body makeover. Other simple training tools for strengthening the hips include resistance bands, specifically Xertubes, resistance cuffs, and Jump Stretch bands. Any of these can be used to hit the multiple muscle groups of the hip complex.

When it comes to working the gluteals specifically, a couple exercises come to mind right away: glute/ham raises and Romanian deadlifts. The Romanian deadlift can be performed using dumbbells or a barbell, and is executed by holding the weight along the front of your thighs with slightly bent knees and driving your hips back in order to lower the weight. It is very important here that the movement of the weight comes from the movement of your hips, not from the movement of your back. If you're not sure of the exercise I'm talking about, it's the one you try really hard not to stare at when the women are performing it in front of the mirror. The glute/ham raise is performed on a back extension machine, but once again, instead of using your lower back to raise your torso, initiate the movement by squeezing your gluteals and forcing your hips forward.

While the gluteals will get plenty of work doing any hip extension exercise on the Multi Hip, you can continue to improve the power of this muscle through these two exercises. You will most certainly be feeling the after-effects of these lifts in your hamstrings, but understand that if these two moves are performed properly you will be blasting your gluteals. One way to focus on the gluteals during these

moves is to squeeze your glutes as hard as possible during the concentric contraction of the move. This will really target the gluteals and lead to even greater results.

So remember, the next time you are in the weight room and are psyched to squat the house, make sure that you work your way into squatting like a man by first lifting like a woman.

Get big or die tryin'.

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