

Squats & Lunges - How To Do Them Properly

Squats and lunges are a go to for a lot of fitness professionals. They are big movements which not only activate the legs and glutes, but also activates the core as well. There are many different ways to perform squats and lunges, which makes them the perfect addition to any workout. They require no weight and if done correctly, can help strengthen and tone the legs, and improve core strength and posture. So how do you know if you are doing them correctly? Here are some key technique cues to help you get the most out of your squats and lunges.

Squats...

Talking normal, plain old squats. Not sumo squats, not split squats, just standard do in your warm up style squats. The important thing to remember here is that everyone is biomechanically different so everyone is going to be set up just a little bit differently. If you have tight hips and ankles, your feet may be slightly further apart than if you were quite flexible through these joints. Does not mean it is wrong, just works better for your biomechanics. So to start with...

- Standing with your feet hip to shoulder width apart (or a little bit further if it feels comfortable to you).
- Toes pointing straight forward or on a slight angle outward (depending what is comfortable for you).
- Start the movement by pulling the hips back and pretending you are sitting on a chair. This prevents the knee moving beyond the toes. Your knees always want to stay behind the line of the toes.
- Knees should track in the direction of the toes. Knees should not buckle inwards.
- Back should stay straight and chest should lift, shoulders back and relaxed. There should be little curve from the neck to the tail bone. Do this by engaging the core - pulling the muscles up and in.
- Head should stay neutral, not looking at the floor, but not looking to the sky either.
- As you move downwards, heels must stay on the ground. At no point should they lift off the floor. If they do, adjust your movement or do not go so low.
- Movement should stop around parallel to the ground (if you can get that low).
- Weight should spread evenly through the middle to rear of the foot. Weight should not be placed on the balls of the feet during any part of the movement.

Lunges...

Again, normal straight forward lunges, not curtsy or side lunges, although the same technique points can be used across all of them.

- Starting with your feet hip width apart, take a step forward with one leg **KEEP THAT DISTANCE**. If you have your legs too close together, it will be like trying to lunge on a balance beam... hard! So to keep your balance, keep feet hip width apart when you step forward.
- Front knee tracks in line with the toe. Knee does not move further forward than the toe. This is the main fault we see in a lot of lunges. To avoid this, imagine you are in front of a wall as you lunge. You need to move the body straight down to the ground, not forward.
- Back foot is lifted onto the toe, and back leg bends straight down towards the ground until the shin is parallel to the ground. You should have a 90 degree bend (or close to) in each leg. If you need to, adjust the length of your stance to achieve this.
- Weight should never be placed in the ball of the front foot. Weight should be in the heel and middle of the foot only. If you find you are putting too much weight in your toes, try lifting your toes (not the ball of your foot, just toes) off the ground as you push. This will help to remind you to place the weight further back in the foot.
- Chest should stay lifted with minimal leaning forward throughout the movement. Engage the core by pulling the core muscles up and in.

If you work down these points and notice that any of them are not as instructed. Stop and start again. Keep them slow and controlled until you are confident you have ticked all the boxes. Then practice! You want to feel your core engaged at all times, your legs working hard but also your glutes firing, so squeeze those buns with every movement. They are best done in front of a mirror, but you can also ask your trainer to check them out and give you feedback. Get these movements right and they can be an awesome and valuable exercise to include in your workouts.