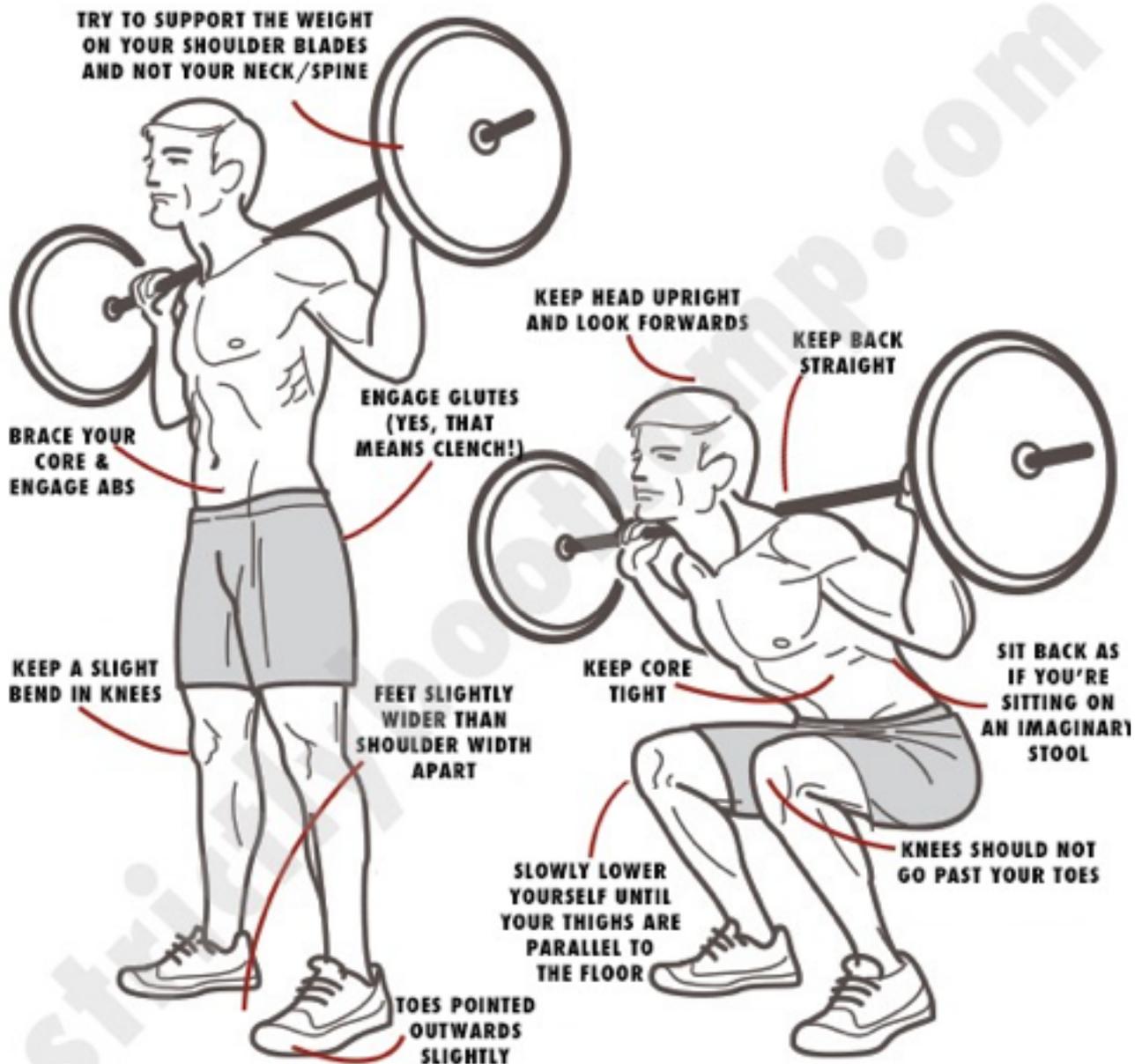


Your legs are the biggest muscle group in your body so working them hard is ideal for both fat loss (burns more calories) and muscle building (works more muscles of course, and optimises your body's hormone balance for growth).

Squats work your legs, glutes, core and back and are the best bang for your buck exercise out there.

Unsurprisingly, supporting the weight at the of an extra person on your back means that good technique is important - to get the most out of the exercise and also for injury prevention.

I annotated this diagram with the main points to remember when squatting.



I'll try and walk you through how to set up your squats from start as well. There is a lot to take in so just take it step by step.

It's easier to get to grips with when you're actually doing it anyway so might be worth printing off and bringing to your next session to walk yourself through it.

SAFETY

- It goes without saying, **only lift a weight that you're confident lifting.**
- With regards to the height of the **safety hooks**, when in doubt you're better off having them a bit lower than too high. It is much much much safer to do a mini squat to get under and un-rack and re-rack the bar than it is to have to go on your toes to do it.

SET UP

- When you're under the bar, try and *get yourself in the middle* so you'll have an even load on both sides.
- Pinch your *shoulder blades back* a bit so that when you unrack the bar, the weight rests on your muscles and not on your neck or spine.
- Grip the bar firmly. The *width of your grip will depend on how flexible your shoulders are*. If you've got quite tight shoulders then you can go with a wider grip. If like me, you've got shoulders which some times have a mind of their own, I'd go for a much narrower grip so that you can support the bar and remain stable.
- *Engage* your *abs* (suck your stomach in) and your *glutes* (clench your cheeks together...) before standing up straight to unrack the bar.
- Step back from the safety hooks so you're roughly in the middle of the squat rack. **If you need to adjust your position, re-rack the bar** and do it. Don't try and move the bar around while it's on you.
- If you're happy with the weight and the bar position, you're all set to squat.

SQUAT FORM

- Keeping your abs and glutes engaged, begin to sit back slowly and controlled, as if you're *sitting back onto an imaginary chair*.
- Keep your *torso upright* as much as possible and look forwards - if your abs are engaged, it should keep your core tight and torso straight.
- The *downwards* movement should take *3-4 seconds*
- Deep breath in as you're going down
- At the bottom of the movement your knees should not be past your toes.
- Also at the bottom your *knees should be at 90 degrees and your thighs should be parallel to the floor*. There's no consensus on whether getting lower than parallel has any real benefit, so if you can get a bit lower then try it and see how you find it. Personally I only go to parallel.
- Half the time I will pause for at the bottom for a second before coming up. It's just something I like to do to get a bit more out of each rep. Give it a go and see how you find it.
- *Explode up* if you can and exhale sharply, making sure you **don't lock out your knees**. Keep a slight bend in them - it keeps the tension in the muscles so you get more out of the exercise. Locking out your knees will give your muscles a rest and moves the tension to the joints.
- Repeat, repeat and repeat.

DIAGNOSING PROBLEMS WITH TECHNIQUE

- Once you're used to the technique, if your form still isn't spot on it will usually either be because you're *lifting too heavy or you may have an issue with mobility*.

- If it's a mobility issue, there are a few tests you can do to work out what the specific cause is - which I'll cover in Part 2.
- If you see me squat, I will always have my heels elevated on 5kg discs. My calf muscles are practically made of stone which massively limits my range of motion when standing flat.

SUMMARY

- Support weight on your shoulder muscles, not on your neck/spine
- Engage abs and glutes
- Slow controlled downwards movement - 3-4 seconds down is ideal
- Keep torso upright throughout and look forwards
- Get thighs parallel to ground
- Explode up but keep slight bend in knees at the top of the movement
- *If you can do **all** of the above with just the bar but not when you've added weight on it, then you're probably lifting too heavy. **Reduce the weight until you get it right.***
- If with the empty bar you still can't get perfect form then it's more likely you have a mobility issue somewhere - I'll cover in more detail in part 2, which should be with you some time tomorrow morning.