

Functional Bodyweight Movements

The squat and the pushup are two exercises among many functional bodyweight movements that you can do anywhere—work, home, while traveling. Functional movements are similar to movements you perform in your everyday activities. These movements use your whole body and do not isolate muscle groups. Building and keeping strong muscles is important to maintaining your quality of life. Performing these movements prevents you from injuring yourself in day-to-day activities. For instance, mowing the lawn with a push-mower or pushing a grocery cart is easier and safer if you regularly do pushups.

The Squat

Why Squat?

How do you get up and down from a chair or the toilet? Squatting is standing from a seated position. The squat is an essential, natural, and functional total body movement.

We have become accustomed to sitting – sitting in chairs, cars, on the couch, on benches, stools, and bleachers. Squatting is crucial to keeping your knees, hips, and back working in your senior years. Let's not wait until the "golden years" to start!

Setup

- Stand tall with your feet under your shoulders.

Execution

- Sit back, as if sitting in a chair, placing all of your weight into your heels, until your knees are bent at or below 90 degrees.
- Return to standing, placing all of your weight in your heels and squeezing your glutes and hamstrings.

Points to Remember

- Be sure to keep your head neutral (chin tucked slightly), chest up, shoulders back, torso elongated, abs tight, and maintain the lumbar curve in your back (meaning I should be able to draw an imaginary straight line from the top of your head to your hips).
- Be sure to keep your weight in your heels and stay off the balls of your feet. Your knees should stay in line with your feet as you squat. To achieve this, you may turn your feet out at a 30 degree angle and push your weight to the outside of your feet as though you are trying to separate the ground under you.

Squat Aides

Squatting correctly requires flexibility and engagement and control of the glutes and hamstrings—all of which can be achieved with practice. When you squat, if you are unable to bend your knees to or below 90 degrees, or if you find yourself dropping your head or shoulders, having your knees roll inward, rounding your back, or coming up on the balls of your feet, you can try these squat aides:

- Hold onto a sturdy object, e.g. chair, counter, desk, pole, etc.
- Squat to an sturdy object, rest at the bottom, and then squeeze your glutes and hamstrings to stand up.

The Pushup

Why the Pushup?

The pushup is another classic bodyweight movement that does not require the use of equipment or machines. All you need is a flat sturdy surface. No other movement engages multiple muscle groups in the arms, chest, abs, back, hips, and legs as efficiently as the pushup. That's why the pushup is commonly performed in athletic training and military physical training.

Setup

- Lie face down on the floor with your palms flat on the floor just outside of your shoulders and with your feet together.

Execution

- Lift your body off the floor by pressing against the floor, tightening/squeezing your triceps and abs, until your arms are locked out.
- Lower your body with your arms until your elbow is at or below a 90-degree angle.
- Lift your body up by pressing against the floor again until your arms are locked out at the top of the pushup.

Points to Remember

- Be sure to lower and raise your entire body in one controlled movement. I should be able to draw an imaginary straight line from the top of your head to your ankles.

Modifications/Progression

Not everyone is able to perform a pushup from the floor. If you are unsure whether you can perform a

pushup, begin by trying these modified pushups in the order in which they appear. Performing a modified pushup will give you practice, build strength, and prevent injury.

- **Standing chest press or wall pushup** – A standing chest press is the most basic version of a pushup. It is performed on a wall while standing. Standing one foot from the wall, place your palms flat on the wall just outside your shoulders and with your feet apart. As you become stronger and are able to perform the chest press with little difficulty, you can move your feet closer together until they are side-by-side and you can move further away from the wall.
- **Incline pushup** – Once you are able to perform a wall pushup without difficulty, try moving to a surface that is at chest level that will continue to elevate your upper body. This keeps the weight of your lower body off your upper body. First try to perform the pushup with your feet apart. This will help stabilize your body and assist you with balance. As you become stronger, move your feet closer together until they are side-by-side. Once you are able to do multiple repetitions, you may move to a surface that is hip-level. Be sure that the structures you are using are sturdy and can support your body weight. For instance, you would not use a bed because the mattress may move when you press into it.
- **Pushup on your knees** – This is often called a “girl” pushup. Once you have mastered the incline pushup, you can move down to the floor. With your knees on the floor and your feet in the air, perform a pushup. Be sure you are moving your body in one controlled motion. I should be able to draw an imaginary straight line from your knees to the top of your head.
- **Modified pushup** – If you still need assistance, you can place your feet wider apart. This will take some of the pressure of the weight from your lower body off of your upper body. Once you are able to do multiple repetitions, try moving the feet closer until they are side-by-side and you are performing an unmodified pushup.

What's Next?

The next step is to mix it up and have fun! Bodyweight movements use only your body weight and can be done without machines and equipment. Other bodyweight movements include: running, walking, swimming, sit-ups, and lunges. If you have stairs/steps, a jump rope, a chair, or can go to a park, you can do other functional exercises, including step-ups, box jumps, jumping rope, tricep dips, and pull-ups.

Your body is smart. If you are doing the same exercise all of the time, your body learns how to be more efficient at performing that movement. And that's what happens when you hear people say they have “reached a plateau.”

Design your own workouts that include functional movements. It's as easy as combining one or two movements and doing five repetitions of each exercise three times. As you get better at each movement, you can increase the repetitions and/or the number of times you go through all of the movements.

If you don't make exercising fun, then you won't stick with it. Ask family and friends to join you. Unlike most of us adults, children can perform these exercises with ease.