

# MIND YOUR SQUAT?

IF YOU  
WANT TO  
BOOST  
YOUR LEG  
POWER, IT'S  
GONNA  
TAKE  
PAIN ...  
AND BRAIN

Sliding onto a bench is a joy for most. A biceps curl is a free pass to admire oneself in the mirror. But asking someone to get under a squat rack is like asking them to spend a week with their uncle—the one who believes aliens communicate through Reynolds wrap. Any athlete will tell you there's not a better overall exercise for muscle development. A stronger squat means improved metabolism, running power, and therefore, health. But hiking your squat is a mental test as much as physical. So let's improve our mindpower.

USE YOUR  
MIND

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## SAT (Squat Advanced Technique)

1999 Amateur English Grand Prix competitor Jamo Nezzar doesn't do squats as much now, but says it was his "bread and butter" as he acquired the foundation of his overall leg development. "I believe strictly in high reps for squats," he says, "and would never go above 405, despite having the ability to put up much more." Nezzar recommends a shoulder-width stance, giving your eyes to the ceiling to keep any unwanted muscles from flying into the movement. "You want to get down to parallel position, but it shouldn't be achieved because your back is bent over. If you can't do it with perfect form you absolutely must lower the weight," insists Nezzar. "This is the one exercise where cheat reps will have the least benefit."

Former Arnold Classic Champion Mike Francois says going heavy weight, low-rep can occasionally shake things up. But again, only occasionally. "Sometimes I would do eight sets of two reps and rest 30 to 45 seconds at most," Francois says. "I found this would shock the muscle fibers, but also would bring me down in the weight I could do from such a small break between sets."

Another key for Francois was never locking out. "Forget about the bad effect lock-out has on your knees; it takes the pressure off the muscle, which will only give you a false sense of your leg strength," he says. "Keep the blood pumping and the reps coming."

Two-time NPC National Middleweight Champion Richard Baldwin believes periodization is the key to squatting success. "Just for mass," Baldwin says, "I found four to six sets were optimal, with the first two to three being warm-ups. But you go by feeling. Sometimes I do as many as

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## SQUATS >>>

- a.** Low rep—Eight sets of two reps and rest 30 to 45 seconds at most.
- b.** High rep—Do reps of 12, 15, 20, then 25, never going above 70 percent of your max.


## ALTERNATIVES >>>

- a.** Hack squats—12 to 15 reps for three to four reps (plié-style to hit upper inner thigh).
- b.** Leg extensions—15 reps for four reps.

## HAMSTRINGS >>>

- a.** Stiff-legged deadlifts—Three warm-up sets then do three to four sets of six to 10 reps at same weight as last warm-up set.
- b.** Hamstring curls pyramid to highest weight then hit for eight to 12 sets.





pounds before doing three sets of 300 pounds for six to 10 reps," Francois says. "I'd then do hamstring curls at 220 pounds, but would work up to it slowly because hamstrings are easy to pull on this exercise. Anywhere from eight to 12 reps works best."

#### go MENTAL

Squats, and most leg exercises, bring out the worst four-letter word in lifters—quit. In the end it's what you do on the last set that will count, Baldwin says. "If you know you have one more rep in you, get it!" Baldwin says. "Remember, it's that last rep which can be the difference between strength gain and staying where you were." Baldwin credits visualization as an important key to his squat gains. "I imagine the thigh I want being built with every rep," he says. "Helps me remember why I'm putting myself through this."

Viator, on the other hand, believes a sneaky partner can be a squatter's dream. "I have a buddy who puts on extra weight without telling me," Viator laughs. "I'm cranking out 15 reps, then I turn around and realize it's with 20 pounds more than I've ever done for that kind of result. It goes to show that we put limitations on strength with our mind, but that our body could be capable of so much more." ⇌