

# Safe squatting procedures

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**Craig Liebenson**

## Squats

The squat is one of the most commonly used exercises for strengthening the lower body. It is excellent for training the muscles of the buttocks, thighs and calves.

Without good leg strength the knees, hips, and back become vulnerable to pain or injury. Squatting is one of the best ways to ensure that you can safely lift things. Yet, with all these benefits there are a number of problems with most squat exercises. If performed improperly they can harm either the knees or back.

This self-help column will show you how to safely perform squat exercises so you can achieve the benefit of greater knee and spine stability.

The key to protecting your back during squats depends on knowing two things.

1. Always keep your lower back slightly arched (i.e. curved forward) when squatting.
2. Avoid squats first thing in the morning or after you have been sitting for a while (e.g. 30 min or more). This will help to protect your discs from being irritated when lifting.

The way to maximize the training benefit in your knees, without causing or aggravating a problem is also dependent on two things.

1. Do not let your knees ride forward of your toes during the squat.
2. Keep your knees slightly turned out so they don't move together.

## The wall squat

- Stand facing a wall with your arms extended overhead.
- Place your palms on the wall.
  - The correct distance from the wall is the one where your palms touch the wall without you having to lean forward from the waist (i.e. slouching).
- Sit back by pushing your buttocks behind you as if pretending you are going to sit on a high bar stool.
- Let your palms slide down the wall as you bend your knees without bending your elbows (Fig. 1).

## Note:

### Avoid

- Slouching
- Moving your knees together
- Moving your knees in front of your toes

**Repetitions:** 10–12

**Frequency:** twice a day

## The ball squat

- Place a gymnastic ('Swiss') ball against the wall.
- Stand with your back facing the wall and place the ball in the

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*Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies (2003)*

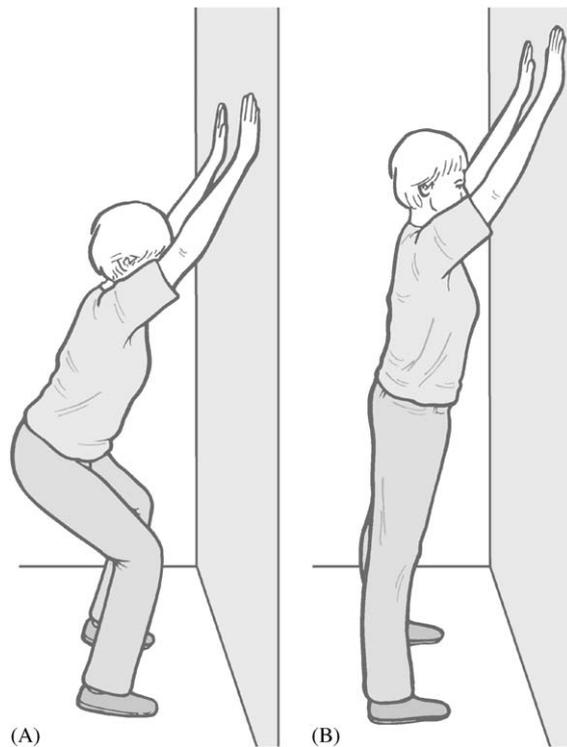
7(4), 228–229

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doi:10.1016/S1360-8592(03)00062-7

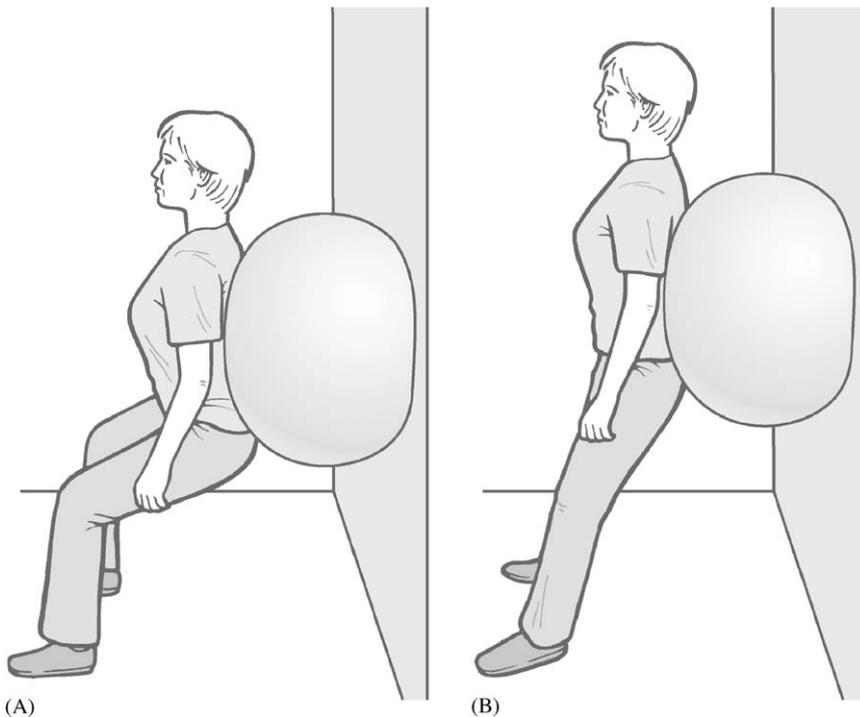
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**Fig. 1** Wall squat.

- “small” of your back just above your waist.
- Be sure your feet are about 6 inches in front of your hips.
  - Slightly arch your back forward by raising your chest in front of the ball and your tailbone in back of it.
  - Squat down the wall keeping your back slightly arched forward (Fig. 2).

**Repetitions:** 10–12  
**Frequency:** twice a day



**Fig. 2** Ball squat.