

Women's Health



SQUAT CHALLENGE

By Amy Marturana Winderl

WHY

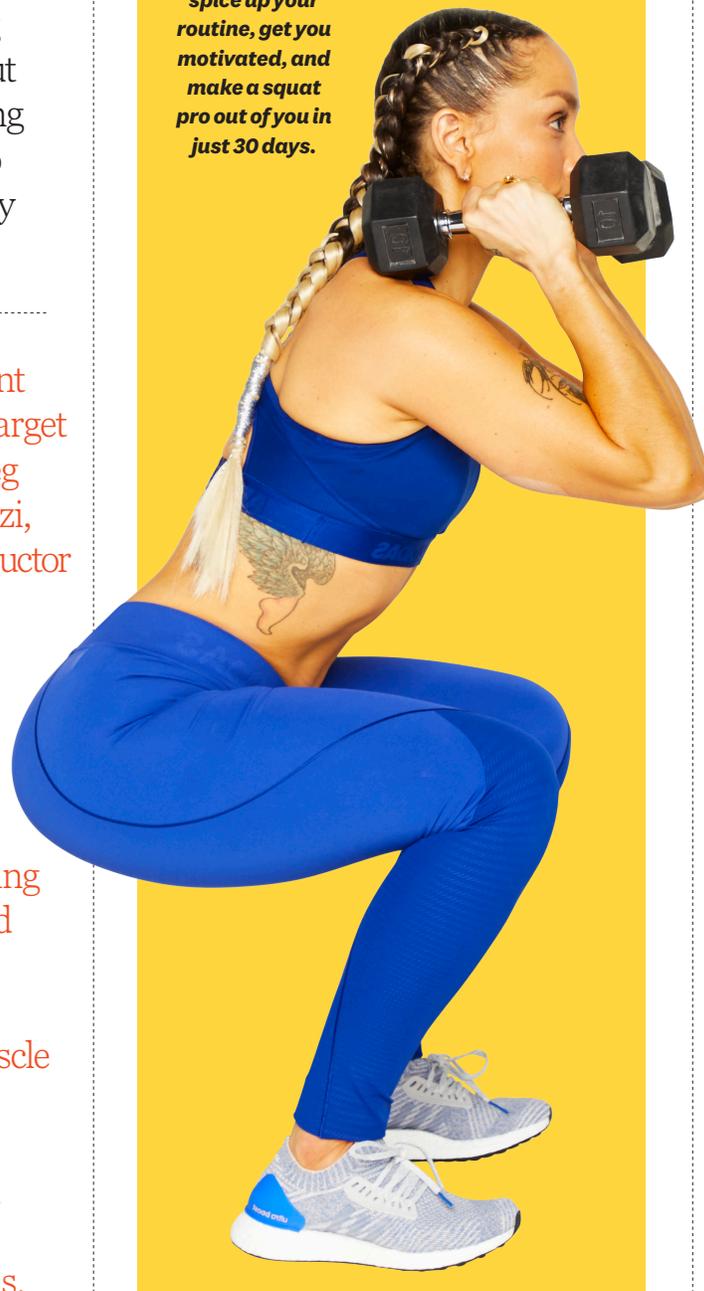
SHOULD YOU DO A SQUAT CHALLENGE?

There's a reason why squats are usually incorporated into pretty much every workout plan: They work, and not just for building your booty—though that is one of the major benefits.

The almighty squat is considered a fundamental human movement pattern (think: sitting into and getting up out of a chair) so perfecting it in the gym will help you move comfortably and stay injury-free.

“Squats are a multi-joint exercise designed to target the hips and upper-leg muscles,” says Or Artzi, NASM-CPT and instructor at Equinox+. “In one single move, you will work your glutes, quadriceps, hamstrings, and hip adductors, while also incorporating your core muscles and upper back.” Because it's an exercise that requires so many muscle groups to work all at once, the squat also raises your heart rate, so you'll get a cardio benefit, too, Artzi adds.

✕
This squat challenge will spice up your routine, get you motivated, and make a squat pro out of you in just 30 days.



▼ LET'S TALK ABOUT THAT BOOTY AGAIN REAL QUICK:

The glutes are the largest muscle group in the body and a huge source of strength and power both inside the gym and IRL, Artzi says. They also help stabilize your trunk, which means that weak glutes can lead to issues like lower back and even knee pain. When your glutes don't do their job right, your lower back muscles can take over and become strained, she explains. Similarly, Artzi adds, weak glutes can cause your knees to cave inward, and small changes in alignment can cause issues over time.

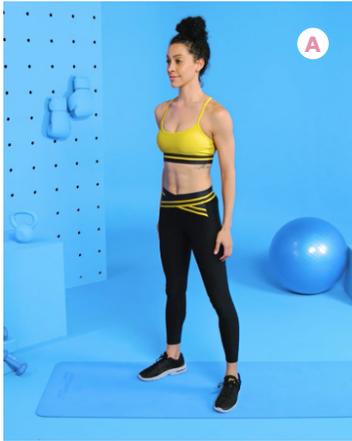
TLDR; strong glutes save lives. (OK, not really, but they definitely make your life a whole lot better.) Which is why Artzi created this 30-day squat challenge.

Doing a squat challenge will give your glutes all the love they deserve, and keep you motivated to crush new goals each day. Because let's be honest: It can be hard to get started sometimes. But when you've got short, doable workouts on the docket, and a program that makes it easy to see how much you progress each day and week, you can't help but pull on your leggings and get to it.

Now, doing the same exercise every single day into eternity is a great way to end up with an overuse injury. That's why this squat challenge involves more than just squats and encourages you to balance out the hip-dominant movement with other activities. By keeping each squat workout short, rotating through different squat variations that work your muscles in different ways, and thoughtfully incorporating recovery days into the program, you'll safely and productively get all the benefits a squat challenge can offer.

THE SQUATS

Below, you'll find everything you need to know about the squat variations you'll be getting very familiar with over the next 30 days.

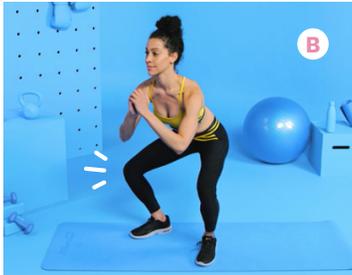


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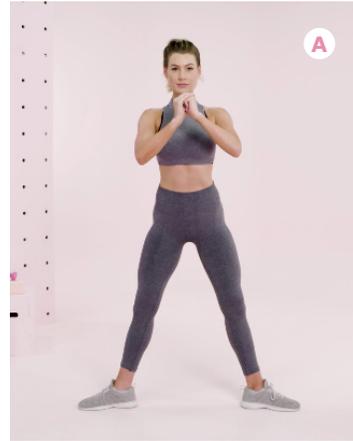
▶ ISOMETRIC SQUAT

How to: Start standing with feet shoulder-width apart, hands by sides. Push hips back and bend at knees until thighs are nearly parallel to the floor while bringing clasped hands in front of chest. **Hold for five seconds. That's one rep.**

Pro tip: Holding the squat for those five seconds before you come up is key. This will help you build up a foundation of strength in the hardest part of the squat.



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▶ PLIÉ SQUAT

How to: Start standing with feet wider than shoulders, toes turned out so inner thighs point forward. Clasp hands in front of chest. Tuck pelvis, keep head over hips, and bend knees to sink into a squat, lowering until thighs are parallel to the floor. Return to start. **That's one rep.**

Pro tip: As you get into position, you'll want to tuck your tailbone underneath your shoulders. Engage your glutes, and think about bringing your hip bone toward your chest.



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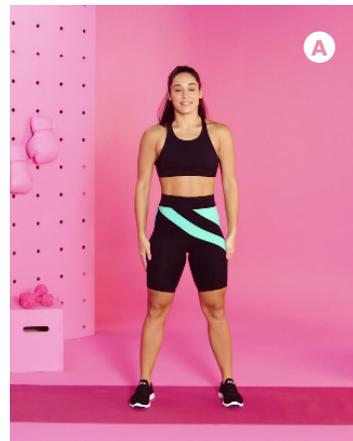
▶ SQUAT WITH REACH

How to: Stand with heels wider than shoulder-distance apart, toes turned out slightly. Bend at knees, sit hips back, and lower down into a squat, dropping arms down to touch the floor between legs. Then, drive through heels to stand up, lifting arms straight overhead. **That's one rep.**

Pro tip: This squat will help you prep for a squat jump by teaching you how to build power in your hips. To do so, squeeze your glutes as hard as you can as you move your arms up, and think about jumping (without actually leaving the ground). Your breath can help, too: Focus on inhaling on your squat down, and exhaling as you stand and reach up.



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▶ AIR SQUAT

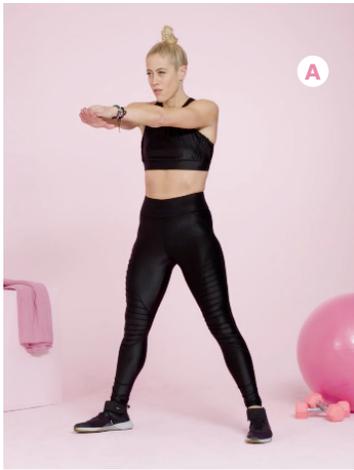
How to: Start standing with feet hip-distance apart, toes pointed out slightly. Keeping the head in line with the tailbone, shift hips back and bend at knees. Lower down until thighs are parallel with floor. Drive up through heels to return to standing. **That's one rep.**

Pro tip: Commit to form and don't be afraid to play with tempo! If you already feel comfortable with the move, adding a little speed can up the challenge.



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THE SQUATS



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▶ SUMO SQUAT

How to: Start standing with feet shoulder-distance apart, toes turned out slightly, and arms extended in line with shoulders, right palm resting on back of left hand. Bend at knees and push hips back to lower down into a squat until thighs are parallel to floor. Pause, then drive through heels to stand up. **That's one rep.**

Pro tip: This is similar to the plié squat, but the main difference is that you want to take your hips backward. Think of pushing your knees out toward your pinkie toes to prevent them from collapsing in.



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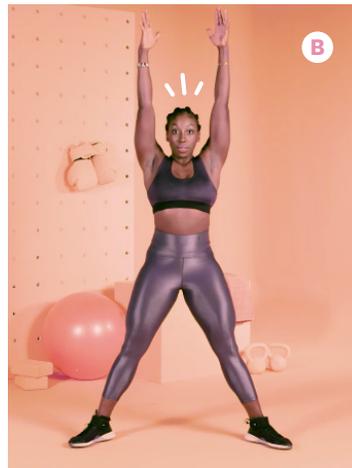


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▶ SQUAT AND HEEL RAISE

How to: Stand with heels wider than shoulder-distance apart, toes turned out slightly. Bend at knees, sit hips back, and lower down into a squat, dropping arms down between legs. Then, drive through heels to stand up, circling arms out to the sides and overhead while lifting heels slightly off the floor. **That's one rep.**

Pro tip: This is the second phase of prepping for a jump, creating power but no impact. Try to lift your heels as high as you can, and bend your knees as you place the heels back down on the ground.



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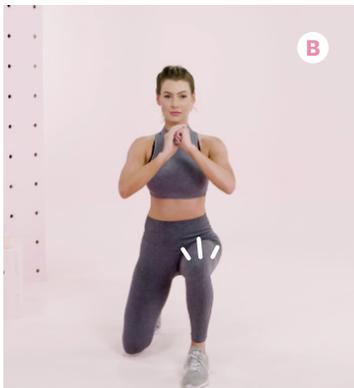


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▶ SQUAT TO LUNGE

How to: Start standing with hands clasped in front of chest and feet under shoulders. Bend knees and sink hips to lower down into a squat, then press through heels to return to standing. Now, take a large step forward with left foot and bend at both knees to lower down until both legs form 90-degree angles. Return to start. **That's one rep.**

Pro tip: If forward lunges feel a little wonky on your knees, feel free to do reverse lunges instead.



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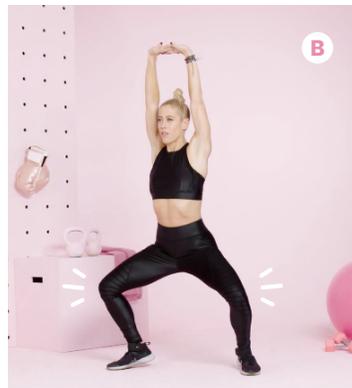


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▶ SUMO SQUAT WITH PULSE ON TOES

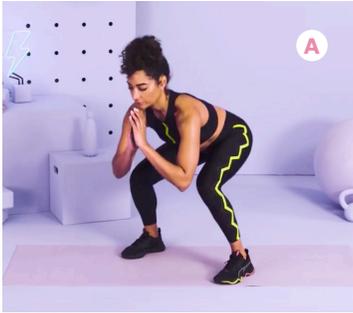
How to: Start standing with feet shoulder-distance apart, toes turned out slightly, and arms extended overhead, hands clasped. Lift heels, bend knees, and push hips back to lower down into a squat. Lift seat up a couple of inches and then lower back down. **That's one rep.**

Pro tip: Try doing this one barefoot to help strengthen your ankles and toes. Also, make sure you're keeping your knees bent and pulsing, not going for the full range of motion. The extended time with your muscles under tension is what you're going for here.



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THE SQUATS



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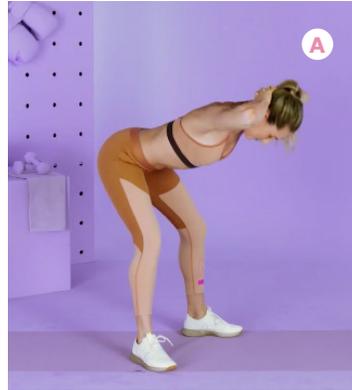
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▶ SQUAT JUMP

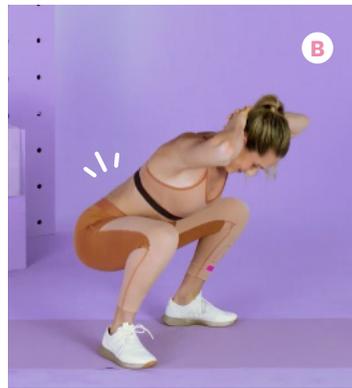
How to: Stand with feet hip-width apart, toes slightly turned out, and arms by sides. Bend knees and sink hips to lower into a squat, then press through feet to explosively jump as high as you can into the air. Land softly on the balls of feet and immediately lower into next squat.

That's one rep.

Pro tip: Focus on the landing. You want to land on your toes, then the balls of your feet, and finally your heels—and make sure to keep your knees soft and bent as you land. This protects them from injury, but also puts you in a position to quickly launch back up into the next rep.



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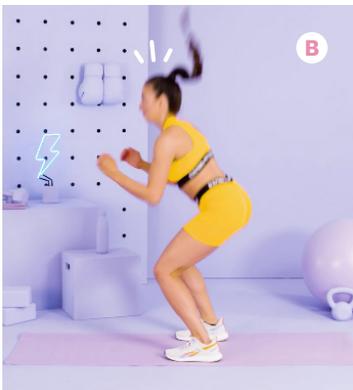
▶ KANG SQUAT

How to: Stand up straight with feet wider than hip-distance apart, toes pointed slightly outward. Place hands behind head. This is your start position. Hinge at hips and lower torso down until nearly parallel with floor. Then, sit hips back and bend at knees to sink into squat until thighs are parallel with floor. Push through heels and reverse the movement to return to start. **That's one rep.**

Pro tip: Hello, hip hinge! Pay attention to the differences as you move from the hip hinge portion to the squat portion. The biggest thing is that your knees bend slightly in a hip hinge to protect your hamstrings, but they don't bend fully like they do in a squat.



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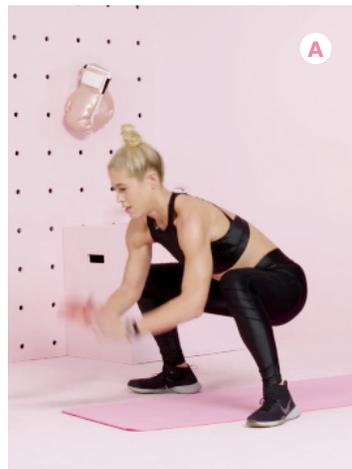
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▶ 180 JUMP SQUAT

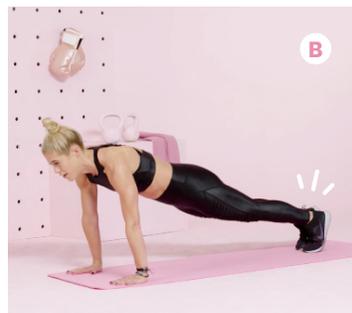
How to: Start in a squat position with butt back, thighs about parallel to floor, back flat, and arms bent with fists up at chin height. Push through feet and extend arms and legs to jump up off the ground while turning to land in a squat position facing the opposite direction.

That's one rep.

Pro tip: This move is great for targeting the obliques and teaching you spatial awareness, but it's also one of the toughest in the program. If twisting makes you dizzy, scale it back to a regular jump squat.



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▶ SPIDERMAN LUNGE AND SQUAT

How to: Start in a high plank position with hands directly under shoulders. Bend right leg and step right foot outside right hand. Repeat on the left side. From here, lift torso until upright in a low squat, bringing palms together in front of chest. Hold for two seconds. Then, return hands to mat and step feet back to high plank.

That's one rep.

Pro tip: If you're having a hard time keeping your back neutral and feel your low back arching, place your hands on a small step stool or a small prop like a yoga block. Elevating your hands can help keep your back properly aligned.

THE SQUATS



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▶ BULGARIAN SPLIT SQUAT

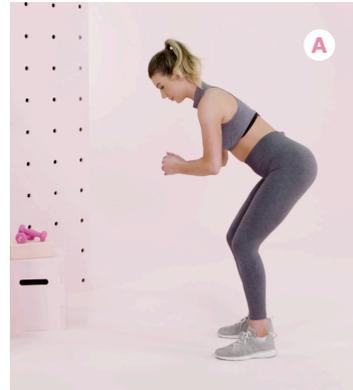
How to: Stand about two feet in front of a box or step and extend right leg back to place top of right foot on box. This is your starting position. Bend at knees to lower down until right knee gently taps the ground, keeping your shoulders back, chest up, and hips facing forward. Pause, then press through left heel to return to start.

That's one rep.

Pro tip: Think about getting your back knee to kiss the floor. To do this, you'll have to resist leaning forward and instead, sit your butt back and focus on going as low as you can.



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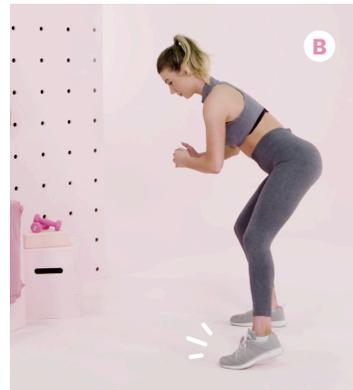
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▶ LATERAL SQUAT WALK

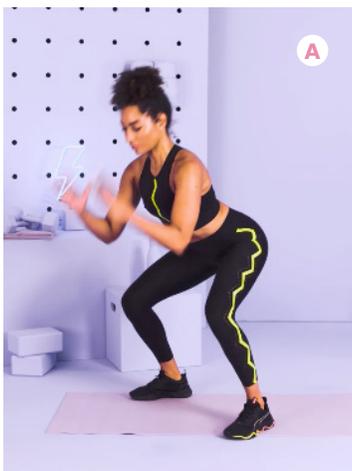
How to: Start in a squat position with torso tilted forward at 45 degrees and hands clasped in front of chest. Keep core engaged, then step left foot out to the left, followed by right; repeat pattern a second time, then reverse the movement to return to start, staying low the whole time.

That's one rep.

Pro tip: Keep your toes facing forward and make sure you're not rounding your spine in the middle of the exercise when you get tired. If you want to up the intensity a bit, add a resistance band around your ankles or thighs.



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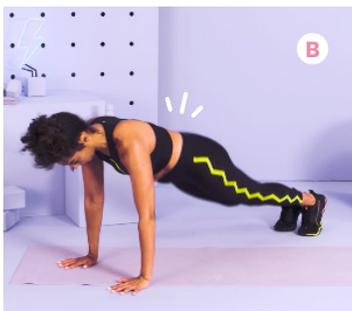
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▶ POP SQUAT

How to: Start in a squat with feet shoulder-width apart and arms bent, hands in front of chest. Fold forward to place palms flat on the floor in front of toes, then jump feet back into a high plank position, shoulders stacked over wrists. Reverse the movement to return to start.

That's one rep.

Pro tip: If you feel your back arching or rounding forward, try using a step stool or prop like a yoga block to elevate your hands off the ground. This can help keep your spine straight.



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▶ SINGLE LEG BOX SQUAT

How to: Start standing facing away from a box (or chair) with weight in left foot, right foot hovering, and arms at sides. Engage core, bend left knee, and push hips back to sink down until butt touches box, simultaneously extending arms out straight in front of body and right foot forward slightly for balance. Once seat taps box or chair, press through left foot to return to standing position.

That's one rep.

Pro tip: Drive heel into the ground as you come up. The higher the box or chair, the easier the move will get, so increase intensity by lowering the chair as you go.



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THE SQUATS



▶ SQUAT PULSE

How to: Stand with feet hip-width apart, hands clasped in front of chest. Push hips back and bend knees to lower into a squat. This is your start position. Press through heels to lift seat up a few inches, then lower back down. **That's one rep.**

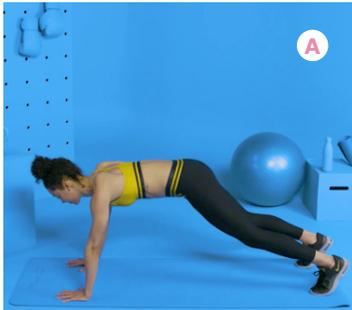
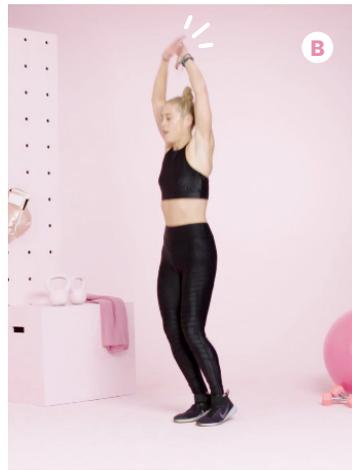
Pro tip: Try to find a slower pace and hold more time under tension.



▶ SUMO SQUAT JACK

How to: Start in a squat with arms crossed in front of chest. At the same time, stand up and jump feet together while swinging arms straight overhead. Reverse the movement to return to start. **That's one rep.**

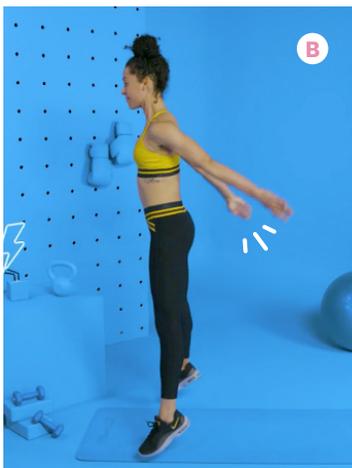
Pro tip: If you want more of a challenge, try to do a star jump instead of a jack (both legs leave the floor as you jump).



▶ PLANK TO JUMP SQUAT

How to: Start in a high plank position with hands stacked directly under shoulders, core engaged. Bend knees and push hips back, keeping arms straight. Press through feet to jump feet forward outside of hands. From here, lift torso into squat, then jump up into air as high as you can, swinging arms behind body. Land softly in squat position, then bend down, replace hands on floor, and jump back to a plank position. **That's one rep.**

Pro tip: Don't skip steps—make sure to push your hips back toward your heels before you come up to build momentum.



Now that you've learned all the moves, you're ready to follow the challenge plan on the next page.

A few pointers:

Feel free to work your upper body on the same day as you do your squats—it's safe since they're targeting different muscle groups

Minimize extra workouts that involve constant tension in your hip flexors like cycling and running. Mix up your routine with dance, swimming, or Pilates instead.

THE PLAN

This program is split into three phases. You'll rest 15-30s between each set and 30-90s between each exercise.

DAYS 1-10: FOUNDATION

DAYS 11-26: STRENGTH, BALANCE + POWER

DAYS 27-30: TOTAL SHRED

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6
ISOMETRIC SQUAT 8 reps X 2 sets PLIE SQUAT 8 reps X 2 sets	AIR SQUAT 8 reps X 2 sets SUMO SQUAT 8 X 2 sets	ISOMETRIC SQUAT 10 reps X 2 sets PLIE SQUAT 10 reps X 2 sets SQUAT AND REACH 10 reps X 2 sets	FULL RECOVERY DAY	AIR SQUAT 10 reps X 2 sets SUMO SQUAT 10 reps X 2 sets SQUAT WITH HEEL RAISE 10 reps X 2 sets	ISOMETRIC SQUAT 12 reps X 2 sets PLIE SQUAT 12 reps X 2 sets SQUAT AND REACH 12 reps X 2 sets
DAY 7	DAY 8	DAY 9	DAY 10	DAY 11	DAY 12
AIR SQUAT 12 reps X 2 sets SUMO SQUAT 12 reps X 2 sets SQUAT WITH HEEL RAISE 12 reps X 2 sets	FULL RECOVERY DAY	ISOMETRIC SQUAT 15 reps X 2 sets PLIE SQUAT 15 reps X 2 sets SQUAT AND REACH 15 reps X 2 sets	AIR SQUAT 15 reps X 2 sets SUMO SQUAT 15 reps X 2 sets SQUAT WITH HEEL RAISE 15 reps X 2 sets	SUMO SQUAT WITH PULSE ON TOES 10 reps X 2 sets SQUAT TO LUNGE 8 reps each leg X 2 sets SQUAT JUMP 8 reps x 2 sets	FULL RECOVERY DAY
DAY 13	DAY 14	DAY 15	DAY 16	DAY 17	DAY 18
KANG SQUAT 8 reps x 2 sets SPIDERMAN LUNGE TO SQUAT 8 reps x 2 sets 180 SQUAT JUMP 6 reps X 2 sets	SUMO SQUAT WITH PULSE ON TOES 12 reps X 2 sets SQUAT TO LUNGE 10 reps each leg X 2 sets SQUAT JUMP 10 reps x 2 sets	KANG SQUAT 10 reps x 2 sets SPIDERMAN LUNGE TO SQUAT 10 reps x 2 sets 180 SQUAT JUMP 8 reps X 2 sets	FULL RECOVERY DAY	SUMO SQUAT WITH PULSE ON TOES 15 reps X 2 sets SQUAT TO LUNGE 12 reps each leg X 2 sets SQUAT JUMP 12 reps x 2 sets	KANG SQUAT 12 reps x 2 sets SPIDERMAN LUNGE TO SQUAT 12 reps x 2 sets 180 SQUAT JUMP 10 reps X 2 sets
DAY 19	DAY 20	DAY 21	DAY 22	DAY 23	DAY 24
BULGARIAN SPLIT SQUAT 8 each leg X 2 sets LATERAL SQUAT WALK 8 reps ES X 2 sets POPSQUAT 8 reps X 2 sets	FULL RECOVERY DAY	SINGLE LEG SQUAT TO BOX 10 reps X 2 sets SQUAT PULSE 10 reps X 2 sets SUMO SQUAT TO JACK 10 reps X 2 sets	BULGARIAN SPLIT SQUAT 10 each leg X 2 sets LATERAL SQUAT WALK 10 reps ES X 2 sets POPSQUAT 10 reps X 2 sets	SINGLE LEG SQUAT TO BOX 12 reps X 2 sets SQUAT PULSE 12 reps X 2 sets SUMO SQUAT TO JACK 12 reps X 2 sets	FULL RECOVERY DAY stretch your quads, and hip flexors
DAY 25	DAY 26	DAY 27	DAY 28	DAY 29	DAY 30
BULGARIAN SPLIT SQUAT 12 each leg X 2 sets LATERAL SQUAT WALK 12 reps ES X 2 sets POPSQUAT 12 reps X 2 sets	SINGLE LEG SQUAT TO BOX 15 reps X 2 sets SQUAT PULSE 15 reps X 2 sets SUMO SQUAT TO JACK 15 reps X 2 sets	BULGARIAN SPLIT SQUAT 10 each leg X 3 sets LATERAL SQUAT WALK 10 reps ES X 3 sets POPSQUAT 10 reps X 3 sets	FULL RECOVERY DAY	SINGLE LEG SQUAT TO BOX 10 reps X 3 sets SQUAT PULSE 10 reps X 3 sets SUMO SQUAT TO JACK 10 reps X 3 sets	SUMO SQUAT TO JACK 10 reps X 3 sets 180 SQUAT 12 reps X 2 sets PLANK TO JUMP SQUAT 12 reps X 2 sets

DO'S & DON'TS Women'sHealth

As you work through this challenge, keep these pointers in mind:

DO: CHECK ON YOUR UPPER BODY

Think about squeezing the tips of your shoulder blades together so that your chest stays open. But resist the urge to crane your head too far up. Instead, you want to keep your neck neutral—not straining up or down—as you squat. Sit tall in a chair and look straight ahead. This is what neutral neck alignment feels like.



DO: KEEP YOUR CORE ENGAGED

A squat is one of the best things you can do for your core—but only if you're actively engaging it. As you lower into a squat, inhale. When you're ready to stand back up, exhale, pull your belly button in and engage your entire core and glutes. Keep that engagement (without holding your breath!) as you stand.

DO: THINK ABOUT PRESSING YOUR KNEES OUT

It's common for the knees to collapse in toward each other. It might not cause any immediate problems, but it puts sideways pressure on your knee joint and can lead to pain and injury over time. Think about pressing your knees over your middle toe. If you're having trouble figuring out how this feels, loop a resistance band around your thighs just above your knees. This will force you to actively press out against the band and get used to the sensation.

DON'T: ONLY SQUEEZE YOUR GLUTES AT THE TOP

Instead of focusing solely on squeezing your booty at the top of the move, think about squeezing it when you press through your heels to stand up. This will feel more natural, and will make sure your glutes are driving the entire movement, not just the last bit.

DON'T: LET YOUR HEELS COME OFF THE GROUND

One of the cardinal mistakes of squatting is leaning too far forward, which makes the move more quad-dominant and puts pressure on the knees. Pressing your heels into the ground will ensure you're sitting back and activating your glutes and hamstrings. It's more helpful to focus on this cue than the old "knees shouldn't go over your toes" directive. If you're sitting back and planting your heels on the ground, your knee will go where it should.

If your heels tend to pop up at a certain depth, only squat as deeply as you can while keeping your heels on the floor. As your mobility increases, you'll be able to go deeper.

DO: PLAY WITH YOUR FOOT POSITIONING

Hip-distance or shoulder-distance apart? It depends. Typically, hip-distance is where you want to be, but depending on your mobility, it might feel more comfortable to move your feet a little farther apart. You can also turn your toes out slightly if that feels natural for your body.

TIPS & TWEAKS

Fitness is not one-size-fits-all, so feel free to make changes as you work through this challenge. Here are some tips for doing just that:

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EXTEND THE FOUNDATION STAGE.

Day 1 and 2 only include two exercises, so that you can focus on building a foundation—**basically, the goal here is to get comfortable with the squat pattern** before adding more complex variations. Think of it as a warm up. If you feel like you need more time to get comfortable squatting, tack on another two days of foundation work before adding in the third exercise. The most important thing is that you feel comfortable squatting with proper form, so taking some extra time to focus on that can only help you in the long run.

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ADD REPS AND SETS.

The recommended **reps range from 8-15, but you can scale that up or down based on your fitness level.** Also, the majority of the month (until the final three days) only has you doing two sets of each exercise, but you can totally add a third if it feels right to you.



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REST FOR MORE OR LESS TIME.

The plan calls for **resting 15 to 30 seconds between each set and resting 30 to 90 seconds between each exercise,** but you can adjust that according to how you feel. When the intensity cranks up at the end of the challenge, you may need more rest time, but you'll also have a few weeks of work under your belt and be more conditioned than when you first started. Go with what you feel.



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INCORPORATE RECOVERY DAYS.

Rest and recovery is just as important as the actual workouts you do. If you're ever feeling too sore to squat, or like something is wrong—your knee is achy, or your lower back is tweaking out—take another rest day. Or two, or three. **If your body is telling you it needs more rest, listen to it.** You can then start back up where you left off and just extend the challenge by a few days. If you only missed one or two workouts, feel free to just skip them so you can stay on track. If you miss more than three workouts in the Foundation stage, Artzi recommends starting over to make sure you build a good foundation of strength and form; **days 11-26 are more flexible, so it's OK to miss three or even four workouts and just keep going if you want to;** and if you miss any workouts in days 27-30, just pick up where you left off.



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ADD WEIGHTS.

If you still need more of a challenge after adding reps and sets, feel free to add a pair of dumbbells. Start with something on the lighter end, and add more as you feel comfortable.