

## Overhead Squat

The overhead squat is useful for everyone because it helps with strength, coordination, flexibility and range of motion (ROM) in the shoulder girdle and ankles. If implemented properly, you gain lower body strength from the squat portion. But in addition to, by adding weight overhead, you are strengthening the muscles of your shoulder girdle and back by forcing them to be retracted and depressed. This in return helps for a naturally straight and stable spine. Along with strength gains, more benefits arise from increasing the range of motion of your shoulders, hips and ankles. If you're new to the overhead squat, it is best to start with just an empty bar, dowel rod, stick or roller over your head and then gradually and systematically progress in weight under strict orthopaedic guidelines. Hold the bar over your head with a wide grip and your elbows locked and lined up with your ears. Feet should be placed about shoulder width apart. **Remember**, it is very important to relax your traps. Instead pinch your shoulder blades together and down, known as retracted and depressed. With a tight core, sit your butt back and down like a normal squat while concentrating on not letting your arms come forward by pinching those shoulder blades together. Squeeze your glutes and drive up through your mid-foot with the end result "standing w/ tall & pretty posture".

There are a couple of issues that often time cause a poor overhead squat:

1) Strengthening the rotator cuff creates stability, but don't spend a lot of extra time stretching it. The risk of over-stretching the posterior capsule isn't worth the miniscule benefit. Instead, devote time everyday to rolling the rotator cuff on top of a tennis ball to increase intramuscular flexibility w/o compromising integrity.

2) Address the "upper-cross syndrome" by stretching your chest through any orthopaedically sound method you choose. If your rhomboids and low traps don't engage, the bar will drift up and consequentially forward. Set yourself up in a "tall, pretty posture" in either a vertical pull up or dip position. From here, just shrug and reverse the motion (reverse shrug is a Scapular Depression). You can start off bodyweight and eventually hold a weighted belt or just a Db in between your feet. Your upper thoracic spine on the top of each rep should feel like how you want to be at the bottom of your overhead squat. Please keep your reps perfect, low volume and strong (8-10x)

3) Lastly, address your hip flexor stability (strength & mobility). The iliopsoas needs to be responsive to that heavy eccentric loading. This can be accomplished through orthopaedically correct, heavy, deep stretching (hip flexors) lunges. When the hip flexor isn't responsive to this stretch and can not isometrically hold a position, it will pull the torso towards the thighs and the thighs towards the torso (like a crunch). The hip flexors originate on the spine (from the back) and insert all the way across to the front of the mid thigh (to the front). Keep your hip flexors optimally flexible.

For example, a complex to perform after a thorough warm-up would be:

- A) 90 degree Shoulder & Chest Stretch R&L [:05-:07sec (3x)]
- B) Z-Stretch R&L [:05-:07sec (3x)]
- C) V-Pull Up Pos Scapular Depressions [8-10x]
- D) Bb Deep Lunge R&L [Alt @3-4xe]
- E) Bb Overhead Sqt [singles (3-4x)]

Perform this complex 3x and twice a week. Over the course of 3-4 weeks, you should see marked improvements in your overhead squat.