

Squat's the magic word

Join our six-week plan to hit top shape

Ashleigh Gleeson

One of the most important exercises anyone over the age of 35 can do is a squat, experts say, labelling it an “all rounder”. It will not only tone your legs and butt, but it also strengthens important muscles that help you keep doing everyday tasks into old age. Today, the Saturday Herald Sun is launching the Get Your Body Right series, which will run over six weeks and help you get more toned and healthy.

Each week we will progress you with a new workout routine. In week one we start with the legs, with a workout explained by Kieser exercise scientist Deb Lawrence.

Dr Christina Ekegren, from the Rehabilitation Ageing and Independent Living research centre at Monash University, said now was the time to start because while people under 35 did not need to do much to maintain muscle mass, it really started to decline afterwards.

“That’s if you’re not doing regular strength training,” she said, adding this could include squats.

“Squats are a really important exercise for older adults because it’s a really functional exercise, it’s really important for being able to get up from a chair, getting out of the car, getting up and down off the floor. It’s also great for going up steps and hills and also just maintaining your balance when you’re walking, especially over uneven surfaces.”

Dr Ekegren, who is also a physiotherapist, pilates instructor and dance teacher, said wall sits and lunges – also in the week one program – were modified forms of squatting with similar advantages to working the quads and glutes.

“A lunge is a more advanced version of a squat because you have to work a bit harder to maintain your balance as you’re going forwards and backwards,” she said.

Monash Exercise Neuroplasticity Research Unit’s Dawson Kidgell said there was strong research behind the benefits of squatting and it was great for mobility as it also developed hip and ankle strength.

“It’s going to build that lower body strength for purposeful movement that targets big muscles of the lower limbs, it develops



Brandon Demura demonstrates this week’s leg exercises. Pictures: Mark Stewart

WEEK ONE

WALK:

Aim for 4000 steps a day this week, or 20 minutes of walking, when we take into account your incidental exercise throughout the day. We will gradually increase your step count each week.

LEG EXERCISES:

BEGINNER: 8-12 repetitions

INTERMEDIATE: 20 repetitions

ADVANCED: Go beyond until fatigued

SQUAT

A really great all-rounder exercise because it strengthens the whole lower limb and involves your joints. If you are a beginner, use a chair. Slowly bend your knees and push your bottom back. You can slightly touch the chair. Slowly stand up. Be careful your knees don’t cave in.



LUNGES

IF YOU WANT EASIER: WALL SIT

If squatting is not working for you, this one is great because you are back up against a wall so you are really well supported. You will feel this in your thigh muscles. The lower you go, the harder it is. Sit against the wall at a 90-degree angle.

IF YOU WANT HARDER: LUNGES

Put one leg in front, one leg behind while standing. Then go down so your back knee is just off the ground, then slowly raise back up. Keep looking straight ahead so your torso stays up straight. Use a chair for support if you’re feeling a bit wobbly.

SCAN



MORE EXERCISES FOR MOBILITY AND BALANCE

“It’s the type of muscle action that produces the largest amount of strength”

Dawson Kidgell

a special type of strength because you start the movement by lowering your body ... it’s the type of muscle action that produces the largest amount of strength,” he said.

“I know people in their 70s that still squat ... it is a great exercise.”

Director of Cardiology at St Vincent’s Hospital Andrew MacIsaac said people should prioritise exercising for their heart health.

“It’s extremely important, it’s one of the pillars of healthy life, regular moderate intensity exercises significantly improves people’s chances of avoiding heart attack, disease and stroke, there’s no doubt about that,” he said.

“Many of the people we see with heart problems tend to be more sedentary.”

NEXT WEEK: ARMS



CLAM

CALF RAISES

Stand behind a chair holding the back of it if you need support. Stand up on your tip toes and hold. For more of a challenge, stand on one leg at a time. To progress even harder, have your feet off the edge of a step while you move on to your tip toes slowly.

STEP-UPS

This is good exercise that also might make you feel puffed. Start in a standing position with a step in front of you. If you there’s a handle you can use it for support. Step up with one leg and stabilise, before bringing

your second leg up. Then step down one leg at a time. To make it harder, bring your non-weightbearing leg up to 90 degrees.

CLAM

The clam is really good because it targets the stabiliser of the hips. Don’t do it if you have any hip pain. Lie on your side with your back up and straight against the wall. Have your knees bent, but with your hips and feet rested against the wall too. With your feet staying together, lift your knee slowly, then slowly lower down.



WALL SIT



CALF RAISES



STEP-UPS



National Health Editor Ashleigh Gleeson

YOUR NEW HOME FOR HEALTH

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