



Powerlifting: basics

The basics of powerlifting lie in good form, heavy weight, low reps and long rest periods. In order to keep making good progress as a powerlifter good form is essential to prevent injury and maximise your potential.

As well as focusing heavily on the core compound lifts a powerlifter also needs to make sure they train the smaller muscle groups using isolation exercises in order to achieve a balanced physique. As an example, although the bench press focuses mainly on the chest you also need strong lats and triceps to perform the lift. Neglecting to train certain muscle groups will hinder your progress and increase the chance of injury.

In terms of nutrition it is important to concentrate on quality as well as quantity. You should always take care of your body and feed it with nutrient rich foods. Your overall health is of utmost importance. Make sure you are eating about six to seven high protein meals every day and eat plenty of fruits and vegetables to help your body recover more quickly. If you are unsure or needing to control your weight, then you may consider making an appointment with a Nutritionist.

Always remember to compete with yourself and no one else. You want to lift as much weight as possible but do not sacrifice good form to do it. Progress should always be slow and steady.

SQUAT

Squats require serious concentration and an almost superhuman physical and mental effort. Squats are the most technically demanding of all exercises and require a great deal of practice before you can get them right. Almost everyone can squat and like any other exercise injuries are caused by improper form and not the exercise itself.

For safety reasons you should always perform your squats in a squat rack. This means that if your legs give in and you stumble or fall then you have a set of safety pins to catch the bar for you. Set the safety bars to just below the depth to which you will be squatting.

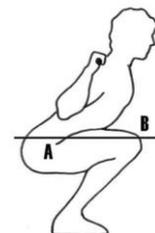
Make sure you always keep your head looking forward and slightly down, have your chest raised, tighten your back muscles and keep your back straight and tight.

Position the bar on the squat rack at a height just lower than your shoulders. The bar should be positioned low, on the muscles of your back shoulders, resting comfortably across your trapezius. You might need to experiment slightly with the bar position so always use light weights to master your technique and then move on to heavier loads when you are more comfortable.

Grip the bar with your hands and place them as close to your shoulders as possible as this will lock in the bar; some may not be able to do this therefore experiment with your hand position. Your feet should be parallel and squarely under the bar. Never lift a bar with one foot in front of the other as it will put a twist in your back; lift it from the rack by pushing up with your legs.

Step back and position your feet at just slightly more than shoulder width apart. Again, you may need to experiment as some Powerlifters have a very wide stance so they can push back to squat. A lot of this will come down to a person's anthropometry.

To commence your squat break at your hips and lower yourself until your hip is slightly below your knee slowly until the top surface of the hip joint at the junction of the hip and thigh is lower than the knee at the top of the vastus medialis muscle. Make sure not to bounce at the bottom of the movement.



Always start and complete your lifts with an erect stance – upright and knees located back. You should always practice full squats, where you descend all the way down rather than partial squats.

As with all exercises, learning to squat with correct form takes time and patience, but once mastered the squat will improve your strength, muscle mass and overall health.

BENCH PRESS

When training for strength you want to keep your reps in the 1-5 range and from time to time vary your rep range. One of the most common strategies is to use five sets of five reps. You need to challenge your muscles by lifting heavier weights each time you get in the gym. You can add more sets if you need to but make sure to keep the reps low and include doubles and triples for maximum strength gains from time to time. Do not test frequently as it will detract from your training and limit your gains for competing.

The maximum width for competing is 81cm between your index fingers. You can place your hands within this measurement, but the ideal is the maximum. The ideal hand position will depend on the relationship to the width of your shoulders. Always wrap your fingers around the bar and lock with your thumb (never use what is commonly known as the “suicide grip”). If you're hands get too close together you will be relying more on your triceps and less on your chest muscles.

Keep your feet solidly placed on the floor. Try and keep your heels in line with your hips. Many people tend to lift up onto their toes which is not permitted in competition therefore try and keep your heels flat on the floor at all times to give yourself more power.

If you are competing in Powerlifting ideal you want to have your chest arched up as high as possible to maximise strength. To do this dig your shoulders hard into the bench and use your legs to brace your body to assist in holding up your chest. Ideally your arch should be controlled by your upper back muscles. Stretching exercises will assist in flexibility.

When lifting the bar up off your chest try and push upwards as it's the shortest distance and keep your elbows in line with the bar. This will help you move heavier weight and activates the muscles in your chest more effectively. When you reach the top of the movement, try and keep the bar in line with your upper chest and in line with your lower chest when you are at the bottom of the movement.



DEADLIFT

The secret to a good deadlift is to do it with your hips and legs and not your lower back. Turns out, it's all in learning how to “fire” your legs, hips and glutes in your posterior chain before you start moving the weight. If you don't do this, your body will be forced to initiate the deadlift with your lower back instead which can lead to injury and less weight lifted.

To avoid loading your lower back make sure you always keep your head looking forward and slightly down, have your chest raised, tighten your back muscles and keep your back straight and tight. Brace your abs and inhale air into this spot and hold it. TO maximise tension from the floor up, tighten everything, grip the floor with your toes, tighten your legs, glutes, squeeze the bar, arms, make sure everything is tight.

Right about here you're going to start descending, sitting back like you're sitting into a chair to get your hands on the bar. Only sit back enough (go low enough) to get down enough to get your hands on the bar, your hips should still be high in the air, and you should feel a lot of tension in your hamstrings because they're getting loaded at this point.



Here's the Secret: So you got a good grip on the bar and you're going to pull it off the floor. Make sure you're squeezing the floor and your feet are planted, weight is primarily over your heels. Right before you pull, you want to slightly "Bow" your knees (your legs) out towards your elbows — flexing the outside of your legs and thighs and activating your hips.

You do not want to roll onto the outer edge of each foot, but you're basically doing the same movement. Instead of just leaving your legs straight you are going to flex them and "push" them both outwards towards your arms — this is what activates your hips and legs.

Now keeping this tightness, is when you start to pull the weight up off the floor... as they say at powerlifting meets: Stay Tight! And keep that tension in your legs and if you're doing it right you're going to discover the first part of your pull goes a little slower because your legs and hips are initiating it up off the floor (NOT your lower back) but once you get it past your knees it'll speed up until you lock it into place forcefully with your hips and glutes.

Try this for a couple of sets of technique practice with a lighter weight. Pick a weight heavy enough that you are forced to use good form because you can feel the weight — but don't be an idiot and try to re-learn your technique with your max or even 80-90% of it. Just work this into your routine and start figuring out how to pull like this.

So that's it — if you're getting lower back pain when you deadlift then you definitely need to put these steps into practice to start your deadlift with your legs and hips and NOT your lower back!



TIPS

Use a spotter – having a partner to help you out with your training becomes more and more important as the weights you are lifting get stronger. Having a spotter is essential when training for maximum strength.

Powerlifting has some very specific elements to the sport therefore if you need some guidance or wish to take your performance to the next level seek out a well-respected powerlifting coach.

Here's an important point: most people will let their ego get in the way and they aren't willing to re-learn anything or consider there might be a better way to do what they're currently doing.

BASICS FOR COMPETING – first time lifter

- Lifting singlet or shorts (fitting / no leggings)
- Knee-high socks (compulsory)
- T-shirt
- Belt, wrist wraps, knee sleeves, lifting shoes (personal preference)
- Pen for attempt cards
- Food and drink (personal preference)
- Clothing for warming up and keeping warm (suggest a blanket or similar)
- Support person

