

Squats for Life!

There is one exercise that should be part of everyone's routine — squats. It doesn't matter how old you are, your gender, or what your fitness goals are. Everyone can benefit from this exercise.

Squats are one of the best exercises for your lower body. They are great for strengthening your legs and glutes, and they also strengthen your core. When you do these properly, they also improve knee stability, promote mobility, and improve balance.

The squat is a somewhat complicated movement, and it is so beneficial because it forces the body's parts to work and grow stronger together as a single unit. It is one of the best functional exercises out there!

This is how to do squats:

1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart.
2. Keep your back in a neutral position, and keep your knees centered over your feet.
3. Slowly bend your knees, hips, and ankles, lowering until you reach a 90-degree angle.
4. Return to your starting position.

For a demonstration on doing squats go to:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDu8MMr6_hU&feature=youtu.be

Demonstration of squats with a dumbbell:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4L0VMnRapA&feature=youtu.be>



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Map your Progress

Have you checked where your team is on the map? See how many points of interest you have unlocked on your challenge trail! Go to your Walk Kansas Dashboard, where you log minutes of activity and fruits/vegetables, and click "See Your Map" in the purple bar at the top. Your trail will appear and you can learn about Kansas history and points of interest. You can go back and click on any points you have already passed through.

A Walk Kansas participant from 2016 wrote,

"I really like seeing the history of towns in Kansas. So, from now on, I will research Kansas history more!"



Climb Toward Better Health

Have you climbed a flight of stairs lately? This can be humbling, even for those who walk and exercise regularly. If you are panting after climbing a flight or two of stairs, consider adding a daily climb to your routine.

Stair climbing adds a vertical element that engages your lower body muscles, including your quads, hamstrings, and glutes. Many activities will get your heart rate up, such as swimming, walking, and biking, but they don't have this vertical element. Stair climbing also provides a workout for your heart, and it burns calories at a faster rate. Just a few minutes of stair climbing a day, at any pace, can boost your health. You can do it just about anywhere. It's free, and there is no need to worry about the weather. You can even save time by taking the stairs. A study involving a group of hospital workers found they saved up to 15 minutes per day taking the stairs instead of waiting for an elevator.

The "mini challenge" for this week is to STEP IT UP! Take the stairs every chance you get when you are going up/down three floors or less.

How Relationships Improve Health

Physical activity and exercise promote many health benefits, such as increased energy, better sleep, and prevention of chronic disease. But the benefits can go beyond physical health. Exercise can improve all aspects of your lives, including your relationships.

Exercise can help you feel better about yourself and improve your mood, which in turn attracts others who are positive to be around. Studies also show that exercise helps your brain think more clearly. This improves your communication skills, and communicating with others is essential for positive relationships.

Having strong social support can also reduce your risk of many significant health problems, such as depression and high blood pressure. Studies have also found that having a rich social life and strong connections can help you live longer.

Exercise, such as walking or riding a bike, can provide opportunities for quality time with others. It provides a setting for you to connect and have meaningful conversations with friends, family, or your spouse/significant other. Engaging in physical activity with others can help hold you accountable to regular exercise. It's also a great way to reduce stress.

Developing and maintaining good relationships involves give-and-take. Let others know you care about them and appreciate them. Communication is key in strengthening the bond you have with others. Being willing to open up about yourself can deepen your connections, but good communication is not just talking — it is also listening.

Effective listening is one of the best ways to show you care for the other person. Effective listening builds trust but takes patience and hard work. This type of listening is more than hearing just what is spoken. It allows you to understand what is actually said, and you may need to ask questions to get the correct meaning of the intended message. The K-State Research and Extension publication "[Family Talk: Making it Work](#)" provides more tips for good communication.



2016 Success Story:

I started riding my bike with my 11-year-old daughter, and she was so thrilled that I know she will insist we do that more. The accountability I share with my daughter and my five friends is the best part of Walk Kansas.

Try Pouch Cooking

For healthful food that is fast and easy, try pouch cooking. Food enclosed in parchment paper or foil cooks quickly because steam from the moisture in food is trapped inside the pouch.

Flavors can be easily blended with this cooking method. Since it is a moist environment, very little added fat is needed. This is a great way to cook foods that tend to overcook easily with other methods, and it is perfect for seafood. Other pouch-positive foods include vegetables, poultry, pork, and fruit. Pouch cooking is also great fun! Everyone can get involved by assembling an individual meal. Even the cleanup is easy.

The sky is the limit when it comes to creating pouch meals. Parchment paper and foil work well for pouch cooking. If you are cooking outdoors on a grill, make sure you use a double wrap of foil.

To create a meal in a foil pouch, spray the interior of the pouch (shiny side) with cooking spray. Layer foods, such as potatoes, carrots, meat, onions, and bell peppers. Then season to your liking with salt, pepper, herbs, and slices of lemon if appropriate. Almost any combination of vegetables and meat will work, or make it a meatless pouch. Don't forget dessert — wrap up fresh apples, pineapple, or any fruit. Bananas are tasty and only take about 10 minutes to cook.

Sweet Potato Tacos

Makes 4 foil packets

Ingredients:

1 pound ground beef or turkey
1/2 cup chopped onion
1 teaspoon chili powder
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground coriander
8 ounces no-salt-added tomato sauce
1/2 jalapeno, seeded, membranes removed and finely chopped (optional)
3 tablespoons water
1 cup chopped fresh spinach
1 15-ounce can beans (black, pinto or white), rinsed and drained
2 medium sweet potatoes, peeled chopped small (1/2-inch pieces)
Salt and pepper to taste
Garnishes: shredded cheese, sour cream, avocados or guacamole, salsa, olives, cilantro



Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 425° F.
2. In a large skillet, brown ground meat, breaking into small pieces. Drain any excess grease. Add onions and cook 1 to 2 minutes.
3. Add chili powder, cumin, coriander, tomato sauce, and jalapeno (if using). Cook over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring often. Stir in water, spinach, and beans; simmer 4 to 5 minutes and then remove from heat.
4. Next you will need 4 pieces of aluminum foil, each about 12 inches long. Spray the center of each with cooking spray. Divide the sweet potato chunks into 4 equal portions and arrange them in a single layer on each piece of foil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Divide the meat mixture among the 4 packets on top of the potatoes. Bring the long sides of foil together over the filling and fold tightly down. Fold and crimp each edge until tightly sealed and formed in a packet.
5. Place foil packets in a single layer on a large, rimmed baking sheet and bake for 20 to 25 minutes until potatoes are tender.
6. Carefully open packets and serve with garnishes of your choice.

Nutrition Information per serving:

350 calories; 11 g fat; 36 g carbohydrates; 28 g protein; 3 g fiber; 320 mg sodium.