

Exercise Technique Checklist

10 points to help you perform strength exercises more consciously

Strength training does not have to be complicated. Many common technique mistakes occur when an exercise is performed too quickly or with too much weight. This checklist helps you perform strength exercises more consciously and recognize common mistakes earlier.

Important Note

This checklist is for general information only and does not replace individualized medical, physical therapy, sports therapy, or exercise professional advice. If you have acute symptoms, pre-existing medical conditions, pain, dizziness, neurological symptoms, or uncertainty about an exercise, have your technique checked by a qualified professional or medical provider before training.

1. Clarify the goal of the exercise

Before performing an exercise, ask yourself:

- What is this exercise mainly supposed to train?
- Is the goal a specific muscle group, movement pattern, or stabilizing function?

Examples:

- During rowing exercises, the main focus is usually on the pulling movement of the back.
- During the Pallof press, the goal is not classic abdominal crunching, but anti-rotation and trunk stability.
- During the leg press, the muscle emphasis depends, among other things, on foot position, range of motion, and technique.

Quick check:

- ☐ Do I know what this exercise is supposed to train?
 - ☐ Does my technique match this goal?
-

2. Check your starting position

A clean movement starts before the first repetition.

Helpful questions:

- Are you standing, sitting, or lying in a stable position?
- Are your feet, pelvis, trunk, and shoulder girdle aligned in a useful way?
- Do you have enough space for the movement?
- Does the starting position feel controlled?

Quick check:

- ☐ Am I stable?
 - ☐ Can I start the movement from this position in a controlled way?
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3. Understand the movement first

Perform the exercise slowly and with control at first, before increasing the weight, speed, or repetitions. This is especially important with new exercises or exercise variations.

Helpful questions:

- Which joints are supposed to move?
- Where does the movement start and end?
- Can I control the repetition without rushing?

An exercise does not have to be artificially slow. But in the beginning, a controlled tempo can help you improve technique, body awareness, and movement control.

Quick check:

- ☐ Do I understand the movement?
 - ☐ Can I repeat it in a controlled way?
-

4. Pay attention to the target muscle

Do you feel the exercise roughly where it is mainly supposed to work? This is not a perfect measurement, but it can be a helpful clue. If you mostly feel your neck during a back exercise, or if you immediately feel knee pain during a leg exercise, it is worth taking a closer look at your technique, load, and range of motion.

Important:

You do not have to feel the target muscle “burn” intensely during every exercise. What matters most is whether the movement is controlled and fits the purpose of the exercise.

Quick check:

- ☐ Do I feel the exercise roughly where it should be working?
 - ☐ Are there noticeable compensations or symptoms?
-

5. Build trunk stability

Many exercises become more stable when you actively control your trunk.

Helpful questions:

- Can you perform the movement without strongly falling into an excessive lower-back arch?
- Does your upper body stay stable?
- Do you shift to one side?
- Do you lose control of your pelvis or spine under load?

Trunk stability does not mean you have to brace as hard as possible all the time. It means creating the right amount of stability for the specific exercise.

Quick check:

- ☐ Does my trunk stay stable?
 - ☐ Can I control the movement without compensating?
-

6. Choose an appropriate range of motion

Use as much range of motion as is reasonably possible, but without pain, loss of control, or forced compensations.

Helpful questions:

- Can I reach the end position in a controlled way?
- Does the movement remain stable?
- Do I feel any discomfort or pain anywhere?
- Do I have to compensate strongly to move farther?

Quick check:

- ☐ Is the range of motion appropriate?
 - ☐ Does the movement stay controlled even at the end?
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7. Avoid excessive momentum

Momentum is one of the most common technique mistakes in strength training.

Helpful questions:

- Are you actively moving the weight?
- Or are you just throwing it up with momentum?
- Can you control the lowering phase?
- Would the movement still work with slightly less speed?

Momentum is not always wrong. However, for most technique-focused and muscle-building exercises, you should be able to control the movement consciously.

Quick check:

- ☐ Am I controlling the weight?
 - ☐ Or is momentum taking over the movement?
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8. Do not forget to breathe

Do not hold your breath unnecessarily long. For most recreational trainees and beginners, calm and controlled breathing is a good foundation.

A simple orientation:

- build tension before or during the effort,
- keep breathing in a controlled way during the movement,
- avoid hectic straining during heavy repetitions,
 - Stop the exercise and seek advice if you feel dizzy, unwell, or unsure.

Quick check:

- ☐ Am I breathing in a controlled way?
 - ☐ Does my breathing cause me to lose tension or control?
-

9. Take warning signs seriously

Muscle effort, burning, or fatigue can be normal during training. Other signals should be taken seriously:

- sharp or stabbing pain,
- numbness,
- a sudden feeling of instability,
- joint pain that gets worse,
- dizziness or unusual discomfort.

If this happens, stop the exercise, check your technique, reduce the load, or seek professional guidance if needed. Training can be challenging, but you should not mindlessly push through clear warning signs.

Quick check:

- ☐ Is this a normal effort?
 - ☐ Or is this a signal that I should adjust or stop the exercise?
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10. Technique first, progression second

Only increase weight, repetitions, speed, or difficulty when the movement is stable. This helps you build your training in a more sustainable and sensible way over time.

A simple rule:

If you can only progress an exercise by using a worse technique, the progression is probably too early.

Better:

- first stabilize the movement,
- then control the repetitions,
- then increase the load gradually,
- regularly check your technique.

Quick check:

- ☐ Does my technique stay stable?
 - ☐ Is the next progression really appropriate?
-

Quick check before your next set

Before your next set, you can briefly ask yourself:

- Do I know what the exercise is supposed to train?
 - Is my starting position stable?
 - Can I control the movement?
 - Do I feel the exercise roughly where it should be working?
 - Does my trunk stay stable?
 - Is the range of motion appropriate?
 - Am I using too much momentum?
 - Am I breathing in a controlled way?
 - Are there any warning signs?
 - Is progression really possible with clean technique?
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Key takeaway

Good technique does not mean that every repetition has to look perfect. Good technique means that you know what you are doing, control the movement, and sensibly progress the load.

Note & Responsibility

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If you have pain, numbness, acute symptoms, pre-existing medical conditions, dizziness, neurological symptoms, or uncertainty about an exercise, have your technique checked by a qualified professional or medical provider before training.

Always adapt exercises, load, range of motion, and tempo to your individual abilities, goals, and current situation.

Responsible for the content:

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