

the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Three Variations of Dumbbell Lunges

Michael Rutherford

In last month's dumbbell article, we explored the effects of different loading positions for the bilateral squat. As I mentioned there, squats are a must for anyone seeking functional fitness. While squats are a heavily practiced movement for my clients, we also incorporate unilateral and contralateral single-leg support movements in the form of variation on the weighted lunge. This set of exercises serves a couple purposes.

First, it is rare that an athlete comes to me with a perfect balance of bilateral strength. Lunges address that difference with a functional, gait-oriented movement. Second, the lunge involves the kind of single-leg support, bilateral transfer of force, and trunk stabilization that are required for most sport, so it has broad carryover.

In coaching a naked lunge I ask the athlete to step as far forward as possible while maintaining an erect torso. The knees, toes, and eyes track forward at all times. Next I ask them to sink the hips. Many will have tight hips and the trailing leg will be perpendicular to the deck. I now start to work the hips lower and move the trailing leg back farther. It is okay to have them touch the trailing knee on the deck. This assists in getting the hips down but making them work that leg back. I coach to have the leading leg with the knee above the ankle and the weight distributed primarily in the heel. This seems to assist in having them sink the hips more than lunge forward.

For my money, the typical forward and backward lunges are terrific, but I also want to incorporate other variables to challenge my athletes in as many ways as possible.

The first set of variations draws on one of the principles I discussed here last month: varying the position of the weight



Front Hammer Lunge

<http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/FrontHammerLunge.mov>



to alter the stimulus and adaptation. The three basic carry positions for the dumbbell(s) are low, middle (rack), and overhead.

Following mastery of the lunge without loading, I move to the low carry position. The low carry is easy to visualize: simply perform a lunge while holding the dumbbells at your sides, arms hanging straight from the shoulders. Once a trainee has that down, you can then integrate single-dumbbell lunges

to vary the loading pattern. This usually gets trainees' attention.

The asymmetrical environment of single-dumbbell loading is without question one of the biggest advantages of using dumbbells, and it is my coaching preference.

Keeping the single-dumbbell theme, I move them next to the front hammer lunge. In my opinion, this is an underused movement in most fitness training. The dumbbell is anterior to the midline, creating additional loading on the shoulder girdle and core. Please note that it does not take much more than a 5- or 10-pound dumbbell if you are insisting on full shoulder extension and letter-perfect lunges (which you are, of course).

Next we explore the side hammer lunge. Like the front hammer lunge, this movement adds focused shoulder work to the full-body work provided by the basic lunge and alters the loading on the midline and other stabilizers. I am especially fond of using this for athletes with balance issues or those whose sport performance requires especially good balance. I've been known to have golfers who set up on varied terrain do side hammer lunges on a slope. This creates a real balance test. (Initially the trainee faces upslope. Once they demonstrate solid performance at that, they can move to decline lunges. This is much more challenging and is usually the point in the program where technique is compromised if you are not careful. Eventually we move on side inclines.)

Finally, and possibly the lunge I prescribe most, is the overhead hammer lunge.

I see this movement in college training programs everywhere. I like the overhead carry position for the shoulder girdle loading and the core integration it requires, and for its training carryover to the overhead squat, the jerk, and other overhead movements. I coach the athlete to really lock out the arm, pressing up through the palm with an active shoulder.

If you are looking for a complete, leg-focused movement to improve your strength, balance, and agility, incorporate these unilateral and contralateral movements into your program. You will no doubt find yourself with more balanced athletic power.



Michael Rutherford (a.k.a. Coach Rut) is the owner of [CrossFit Kansas City / Boot Camp Fitness](#). He has over a quarter-century of fitness coaching experience with athletes of all ages. He has also worked in hospital wellness environments and rehabilitation clinics. Coach Rut holds academic degrees in biology, physical education, and exercise physiology and sports biomechanics. He is a USAW-certified Club Coach and is a CrossFit level 3 trainer. He is also the current national Masters Champion in weightlifting at 94 kg. You can learn more dumbbell moves from his recent DVD [Dumbbell Moves, Vol. 1](#)



Overhead Hammer Lunge

<http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/OverheadHammerLunge.mov>



Side Hammer Lunge

<http://media.crossfit.com/cf-video/SideHammerLunge.mov>