

The 5 Worst Cues in the Fitness Industry (and how to correct the movement)

1. *“Lift your chest” / “Look up!”* when squatting

The goal behind this cue is to keep you from pitching too far forward at the bottom of your squat. The theory being that if you fix your gaze at a point slightly above and in front of you, it will help you maintain your form as you progress through the movement.



The issue with this is that it fails to take 2 very important aspects of the squat into account; spinal position and the strength of your posterior chain. Your spine should remain in a neutral, flat position throughout the movement. If you are artificially “lifting your chest” because your posterior chain is not strong enough yet to support a neutral spine in a more upright position, all you’ll end up doing is hyper extending the spine.

If your chest is coming all the way forward when you squat, check first whether your stance is correct. If it is, then reduce the weight you are squatting or perform other exercises to strengthen your posterior chain more before returning to the squat.

2. *“Lift with your knees, not your back”* for anything resembling a deadlift

This one is incorrect because you shouldn’t really be lifting with your knees OR your back when performing this type of movement, whether you’re deadlifting a barbell, a heavy box, or a sofa. To say “lift with your knees” means to load the knee joint with the weight, then extend the knee while rising up and taking the weight with you. While visually it might look like that’s what happens, it isn’t. (Or shouldn’t be!)



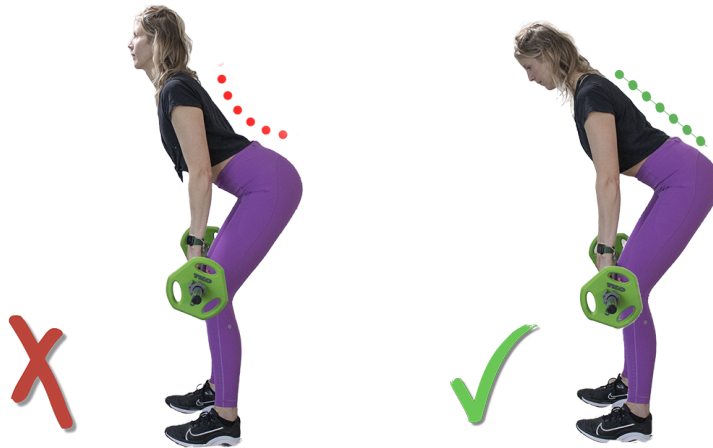
When you lower down into what is essentially the bottom of a squat to lift something heavy, you should leverage your **HIPS** backward so they are loaded with the weight. The powerful muscles of your glutes and hamstrings will drive the hip extension

(which coincides with extension of the knees, an action performed by the quadriceps) to bring you to a standing position, taking the weight with you. But your glutes and hamstrings are the primary drivers, not your knees or your back.

3. **“Push your hips back” during Romanian deadlifts**

A glute-building favorite, RDLs involve maintaining a bend in the knee, hinging at the hip, and lowering weight toward your knees, close against your body, before returning to an upright position.

The cue “push your hips back” is intended to get you to load your glutes and hamstrings, as we discussed above with the deadlift. But if your glutes and hamstrings aren’t firing, what will happen is your lower back becomes the primary mover, tugging your hips up and back. This extends the lumbar spine, breaking the neutral spinal position you want to maintain for this (and most) movements.



Instead of “pushing your hips back”, think “load your glutes”. A good tip to keep in mind here is that the first joint that bends during a compound strength movement is the joint that will bear most of the load. So be careful not to bend your knees or extend your spine first. Brace your core to help maintain a neutral spine, then ease the load of the weight into your glutes and hamstrings by hinging at the hip. Maintaining a neutral spine, drive the hips forward to return to an upright position.

4. **“Tuck your chin to protect your neck” for supine core work**

Any variation of a sit up or crunch comes with this cue on the side to help keep you from engaging your neck instead of your core. The issue is that if you just tuck your chin in, you’re probably creating unwanted tension in a lot of the muscles in your neck anyway.

Starting from a neutral position, if you just tuck your chin you’ll notice that your neck is still in the common head-forward, or “tech neck” position. All you’ve done is artificially tuck your chin. Instead, think of extending your cervical spine (the neck) up through the crown of your head. You’ll notice your chin naturally “tucks” when you do this, but you’ve extended and relaxed the muscles in your neck instead of compressing them.



This also helps keep the muscles of the neck from overtaking weak core muscles during abdominal exercises.



5. “Take a big step forward” during lunges

The idea behind this cue is to create enough space between your feet during a lunge that your core, glutes, hamstrings, and quadriceps are forced to engage to stabilize you and bear your weight at the bottom of the movement. If your feet are too close together, you risk loading the weight into your knees.

The problem is that most people don’t understand the *why* behind the cue, so they take the largest possible step forward (or back, in a reverse lunge) and lower down. Too large a step can prevent the right muscles from bearing the load just as much as a short step can. You also risk forcing uncomfortable hip extension in the rear leg and sacrificing stability throughout the movement.



A far better cue is to lunge to where the knee of your rear leg is lowering to the floor directly beneath your pelvis and the knee of your front leg is bent to ninety degrees. From the bottom of the movement, use your core, glutes, hamstrings, and quadriceps to rise back to the starting position.

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