



GYM SOCKS

Be comfy, look sharp, and still follow the rules

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Socks, we wear them because historically they are the first line of defense against foot blisters. Blisters form with shoe wear when areas of high friction and rubbing between shoe and foot result in the superficial skin layers in the area of friction separating and fluid then accumulates within that space. We experience this as a painful fluid bubble on the skin. Good shoe fit reduces blister formation. However, shoe fit has not always been so customizable and shoe composition has not always been so foot friendly as it is today. For centuries, we have worn socks as an aid in blister prevention, as adding even a simple and thin single layer of fabric on the foot dramatically reduces friction between shoe and skin. Socks are the norm for work and of interest to us here, play.

For long periods of history there were few types of socks and few materials used to make them. But today if you Google the term “lifting socks”, you get back over 16 million hits. If you refine that to specify “weightlifting socks”, you get over six million hits. And if you change the search to find “powerlifting socks” you get over nine million hits.

Socks for the gym and platform seem to get a lot of attention. Or at least everyone seems to want to sell you some specifically to lift in.

But what do the rules, the guidelines for what is worn on the competition platform, say? Do we need specific types of socks, or socks at all?

In Weightlifting the rule is pretty simple, you can wear socks or not wear socks. The wording of the International Weightlifting Federation’s relevant rule states that the lifter must wear shoes and:

“Athletes may wear the following outfit according to the relevant rules:

- Unitard
- T-shirt
- Shorts
- Socks
- Belt
- etc ...”

By including the word “may” in the rule, the choice to wear socks or to not wear socks is wholly the lifters personal choice. Further, if they choose to wear socks

the type is completely unregulated. In previous iterations of weightlifting costume rules, the socks were not allowed to contact any worn knee wraps or sleeves, thus limiting the height to which the sock could extend up the calf. That specific wording has been removed from the currently effective rulebook. So what type of socks are legal?

- No socks
- No Show socks
- Extra Low Cut socks
- Low Cut socks
- Anklets
- Crew socks
- Executive socks
- Knee High socks

All the above are legal to wear and there are many more sock lengths available (and a variety of names for the same styles and lengths). Personal style choice or team uniform are the only driving factors.

Across the many governing bodies in the sport of Powerlifting the situation is quite different. Much more attention to detail is given:

Powerlifting America (International Powerlifting Federation)

Socks may be worn.

- They may be of any color or colors and may have manufacturer's logos.
- They shall not be of such length on the leg that they come into contact with the knee wraps or knee cap supporter.
- Full length leg stockings, tights or hose are strictly forbidden.
- Shin length socks must be worn to cover and protect the shins while performing the deadlift.

United States Powerlifting Association (International Powerlifting League)

Socks

- Socks may be worn, however only one pair of socks at a time.
- They may be of any color or colors.
- They shall not be of such length on the leg that they come in contact with the knee or meet any knee wrapping or knee supporter when in use.
- Full-length leg stockings, tights or hose are strictly forbidden.
- During the execution of the deadlift, one pair of knee length socks must be worn. They must cover to the top of calf, ending just below the knee joint. See drawings below.

- Duct tape may never be worn in place of a knee sock, but may be worn under the sock as a shin guard as long as all duct tape is covered by the sock.

American Drug Free Powerlifting Federation (World Drug Free Powerlifting Federation)

Socks

- They may be of any colour or colours.
- They shall not be of such length on the leg that they touch any knee wrapping or one piece knee cap supporter when in use or with the lifters suit.
- It is acceptable for lifters to wear more than one pair of socks at the same time.
- Full length leg stockings, tights or hose are strictly forbidden.
- All lifters must wear knee socks/soccer socks during the deadlift event.

USA Powerlifting

Socks may be worn.

- They may be of any color or colors and may have manufacturer's logos.
- They shall not be of such length on the leg that they come into contact with the knee wraps or knee sleeves.
- Full length leg stockings, tights or hose are strictly forbidden.
- Shin length socks must be worn to cover and protect the shins while performing the deadlift.
- Socks may not be in contact with the knee and cannot be worn over the knee.

Amateur Athletic Union

Costume (Socks)

- In the squat and bench press, the lifter may wear socks in a raw or equipped competition. The lifter is not required to wear socks or may wear as many pairs as the lifter wishes.
- It is required that the lifter wear long calf length socks in the deadlift.
- The socks shall conform to the following requirements:
- They may be of any color or colors and may have manufactures logos.
- They shall not be of such length on the leg that they come into contact with the knee sleeves, wraps or knee cap, or knee cap supporter.
- Full length leg stockings, tights or hose are strictly forbidden

For the Back Squat and Bench Press the regulations are similar to that of Weightlifting. "May" indicates choice of wearing socks or to not wear socks.

Deadlifting is the outlier, but all we need to do to fully understand and conform to the most robust of powerlifting regulations is not allow worn socks to touch any knee wrap or sleeve from below. Further, the sock should not intrude on the knee joint. The former is easy to accomplish, if there is visible skin between the wrap or sleeve and the sock all the way around the leg, there is rule compliance. The latter is a bit more squishy in adjudication, as the knee is either undefined or incorrectly defined in the written rules. However, the solution could not be easier. The knee is comprised of the femur, tibia, fibula, and patella. The knee joint is at the distal (far) end of the femur and the proximal (near) end of the tibia. By using two very observable and palpable skeletal features we can set a sock height, applicable to everyone and objectively enforceable.

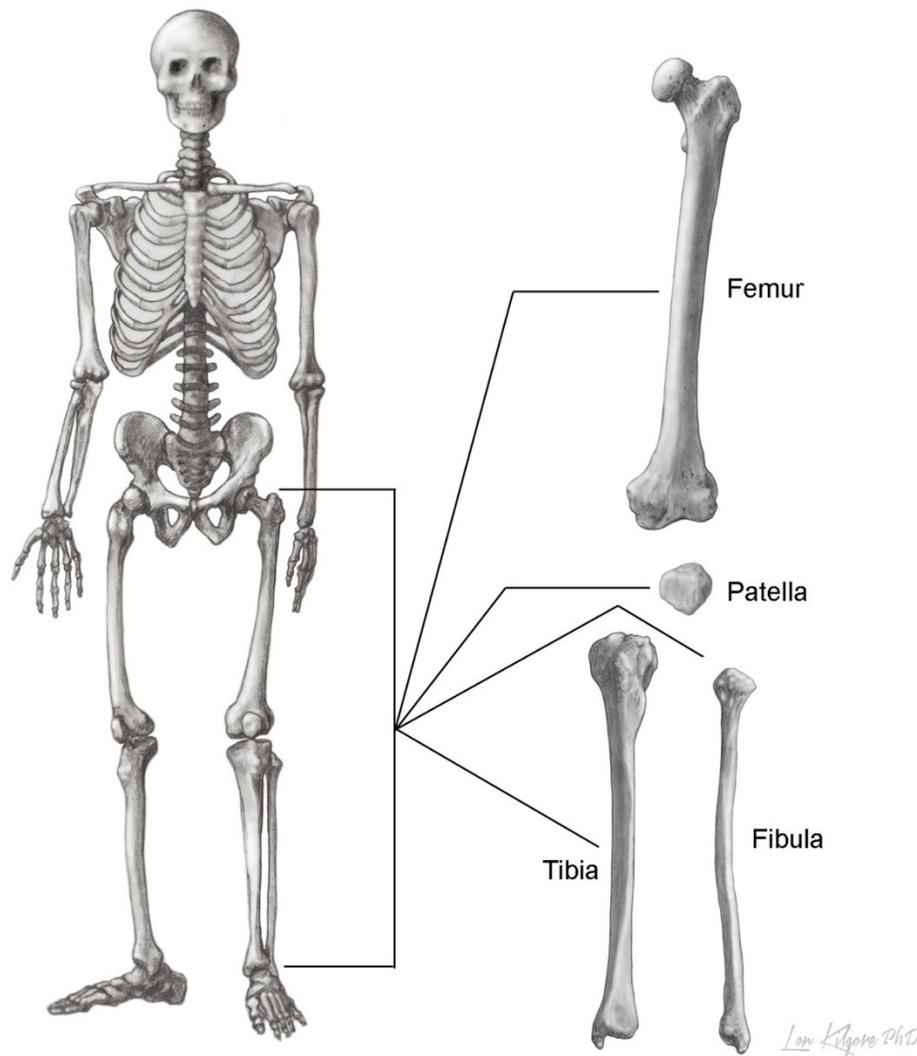


Figure 1. Skeletal anatomy of the knee.

To the front of the knee, below the patella, the patellar ligament attaches to the fibial tuberosity. It is a bony protrusion that is easy to see and easy to feel. On the side of the knee, roughly at the same level as the fibial tuberosity, the head of the fibula also appears as a bony protrusion. It is easily seen and felt. Everything above the level of these two structures is the knee joint and below the very top of the patella is the knee joint. So, if the sock does not rise above the fibial tuberosity and the head of the fibula, the sock cannot intrude into the knee joint.

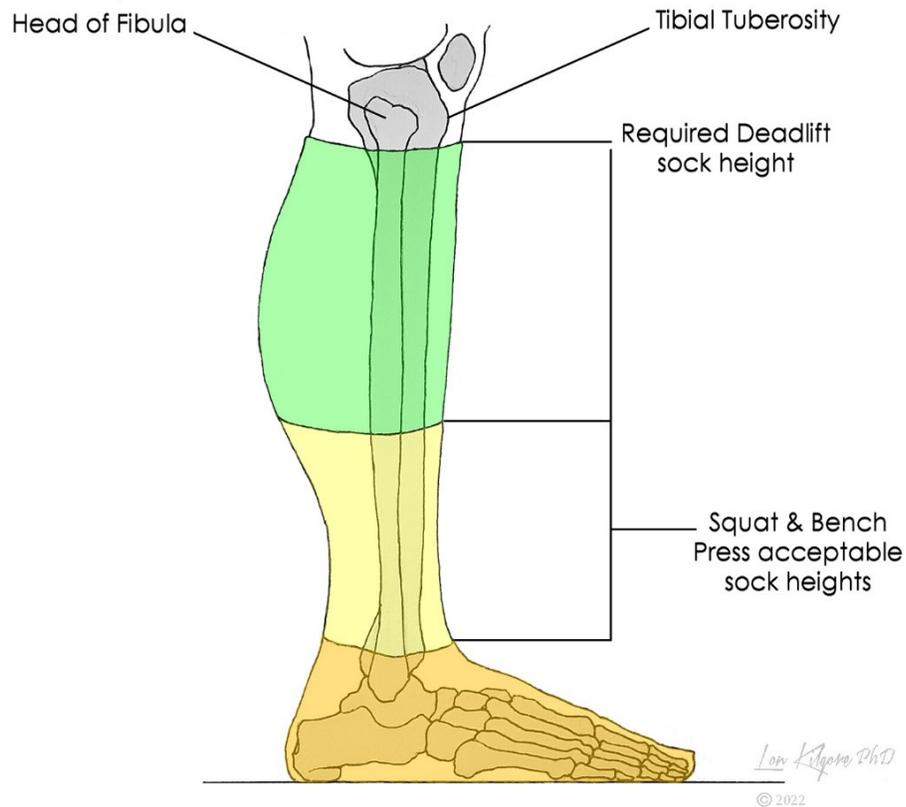


Figure 2. Sock height rules and anatomical landmarks. For Back Squat and Bench Press competition in Powerlifting, in all events in Weightlifting competition, any conventional sock height is acceptable and legal. For the Deadlift only, over the calf *aka* knee socks are required as they provide a barrier between the skin and the bar, thus preventing shin scrapes and bleeding. The easiest way to verify that the sock is worn appropriately and cannot be deemed illegal wear is to ensure that the top of the lateral side of the sock does not rise above the head of the fibula nor above the tibial tuberosity to the front. Both of these landmarks can easily be felt and seen. If the sock extends above these two landmarks it is now sitting within the area of the knee joint and is deemed illegal wear.

RULEBOOKS REFERENCED

International Weightlifting Federation

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Amateur Athletic Union

https://image.aausports.org/handbooks/powerlifting/Powerlifting_Handbook.pdf



Masters III 74kg Class 2018 USA Powerlifting Raw Nationals
(Deadlift socks cover the shin and are visibly below knee joint)