

A free E-book

Kettlebell Beginners Guide

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Getting started with Kettlebell training



A free E-book

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Kettlebell Training

What are kettlebells?

A kettlebell is a cast-iron or cast-steel ball with a handle attached to the top, looking somewhat like a cannonball with a handle. It is used to perform a variety of resistance based exercises, that combine cardiovascular, power, strength and flexibility training. Kettlebells are incredibly versatile pieces of training equipment.



History and origins of kettlebell training

Kettlebells, originally known as Girya, were created in Russia over 200 years ago for weighing crops. Strongmen later adopted this tool for strength training in the next century. In Russian tradition, Girya are typically measured in weight using the unit "pood," where 1 pood is approximately equal to 16 kilograms.



Benefits of kettlebell training.

Kettlebell training offers numerous benefits, including:

- **Full-body workout:** Many kettlebell exercises engage multiple muscle groups simultaneously, providing an efficient full-body workout.
- **Functional strength:** Kettlebell exercises often mimic real-life movements, improving functional strength, coordination, and balance.
- **Cardiovascular fitness:** High-intensity kettlebell workouts can elevate heart rate and improve cardiovascular health.
- **Versatility:** Kettlebells can be used for a wide range of exercises, from strength training to endurance workouts, making them suitable for various fitness levels and goals.
- **Improves grip strength:** The nature of kettlebell exercises requires a strong grip, leading to improved grip strength over time.
- **Burns calories:** Whilst not a primary focus, kettlebell workouts can help burn a significant amount of calories, making them beneficial for weight loss and fat burning.
- **Increases flexibility:** Many kettlebell exercises involve dynamic movements that promote flexibility and mobility in joints and muscles.
- **Time-efficient:** Kettlebell workouts can be short yet effective, making them ideal for busy schedules.
- **Enhances stability and coordination:** Balancing and stabilizing the kettlebell during exercises improves overall stability and coordination.
- **Accessible:** Kettlebells are relatively inexpensive and don't require much space, making them accessible for home workouts or gym use.

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Chapter 2: Getting Started with Kettlebells

Weight

When trying any new exercise, always start with a lighter weight than you think you will actually need. Gauge the difficulty and then increase. If you have access to a fully stocked gym you can practice the movements working your way up from the lightest weights. If you plan to workout at home without having a full range of kettlebell weights I would recommend buying 3 different weight KBs. This will allow you to perform a wider range of exercises. For example a novice female lifter may choose an 8, 12 and 16kg combination and a novice male may choose a 12, 16 and 20kg combination. They are generally available in 4kg increments but you can find various different weights especially on the lighter end. If you are only able to buy or store 1 kettlebell I recommend choosing a weight that you can comfortably lift over head for multiple repetitions, but be aware a single weight for all movements is not ideal as you will naturally be stronger in some movements compared to others.

Colour coding

Competition (more on this next) kettlebells are colour coded, with many manufacturers following this colour scheme, you can usually tell the kettlebells weight without close inspection. But, be aware that this is a general rule and does not always apply outside of competition. 8kg = Pink, 12kg = Blue, 16kg = Yellow, 20kg = Purple, 24kg = Green, 28kg = Orange and 32kg = Red. These are the official competition weights and colours.

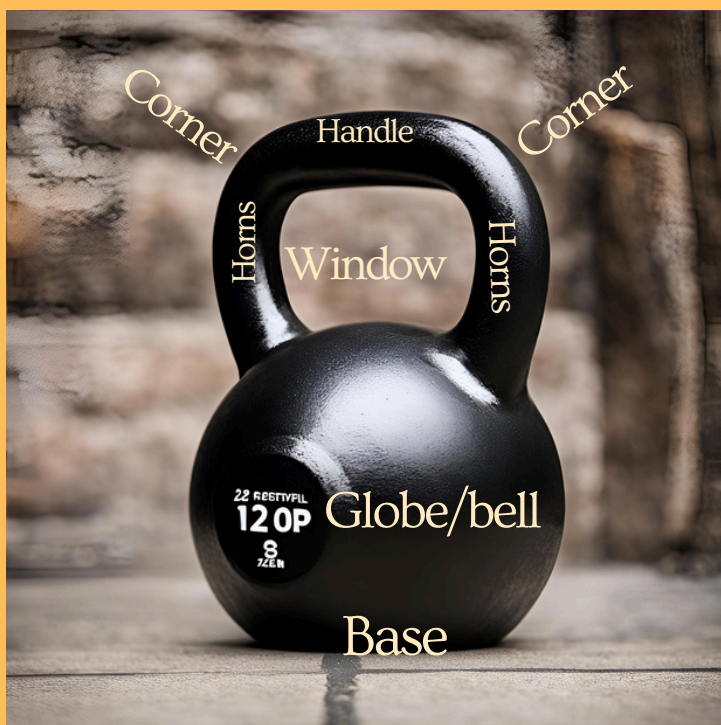


Competition vs Hardstyle

There are 2 main styles of kettlebell training, competition and hardstyle, this is not hugely important for now, but each style does have it's own type of kettlebell, which is worth knowing if you are purchasing your own. Competition style kettlebells are all the same size and shape, no matter what weight they are and are almost always colour coded. Hardstyle kettlebells are solid lumps of metal (hence hardstyle) and therefore they increase in size the heavier they get, they are often black/grey and may or may not have a hint of colour representing their weight. Many people prefer the shape and uniformity of competition kettlebells but they are often more expensive. The variation of size with hardstyle can either be a blessing or curse as the weight sits differently for different people and will be different as you change weights. As you can see there will be an element of personal preference, but I would suggest staying away from any abnormally shaped kettlebells, whichever style you go for, it should always be a round ball with roughly the same size handle



Kettlebell Anatomy



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Chapter 3: Essential Kettlebell Exercises

Basic positions

Hinge

Ignoring the kettlebell, hinging is the act of bending at the hips, while keeping the knee joint relatively straight when compared to a squat. Back should stay straight and shins stay vertical. This body position is often needed in kettlebell training



Rack

This position is also used in many movements such as cleans and presses. But also as just a stable place to hold the kettlebell when performing some lower body exercises. The handle of the kettlebell should rest diagonally across your palm, with the weight resting between the heel of your hand and the base of your fingers. Keep your wrist straight and firm, avoiding any hyperextension or bending. The knuckles should face roughly upward. The hand should be close to your chest with the kettlebell resting against your forearm. The elbow should be tucked in close to your body, pointing downward. This helps in supporting the kettlebell's weight and maintaining balance. Your upper arm should be pressed against your rib cage, providing a stable support base for the kettlebell. Keep your shoulder relaxed and down, not shrugged up towards your ear. This helps in avoiding unnecessary strain on the neck and shoulder muscles. Maintain a neutral spine with your chest lifted and shoulders back. Engage your core muscles to support your back and help stabilize the kettlebell.



The Swing



The Kettlebell swing is the quintessential Kettlebell movement. The kettlebell swing is a dynamic full-body exercise. It involves swinging a kettlebell from between the legs to chest height. The movement is initiated by hinging at the hips and using the hips and legs to generate momentum. Targets muscles in the posterior chain, including the hamstrings, glutes, and lower back. Provides benefits for strength, power, and cardiovascular endurance.

The Swing

- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and grip the kettlebell with both hands.
- Hinge at the hips to push the kettlebell back between the legs.
- Use a powerful hip thrust to swing the kettlebell forward, reaching chest level as the hips fully extend.
- Maintain a neutral spine and engage the core and glutes to stabilize the body.
- Let the Kettlebell descend, arcing back through the legs, then hinge the hips and repeat the movement for rep two.



The Turkish Get-Up

The Turkish get up is a functional exercise originating from ancient wrestling traditions, focusing on full-body strength, stability, and coordination. It begins with the participant lying flat on their back, holding a kettlebell with one arm extended towards the ceiling. With precise movements, they sequentially transition from lying to standing, maintaining the weight overhead throughout the exercise. This dynamic movement engages multiple muscle groups, including the core, shoulders, hips, and legs, while emphasizing balance and control. The Turkish get up is renowned for its effectiveness in building overall strength, improving mobility, and enhancing functional fitness.

The Turkish Get-up

- **Starting Position:** Lie flat on your back on the ground, with your legs extended and one arm holding a kettlebell or dumbbell directly above your shoulder, perpendicular to the floor. Your other arm should be extended to the side at a 45-degree angle for stability.
- **Roll to Elbow:** Bend the knee on the same side as the weight, and use your free arm to prop yourself up onto your elbow. Keep your eyes on the weight throughout the movement.
- **Push to Palm:** Press through your bent arm's hand to lift your torso off the ground, supporting yourself on your hand..
- **Bridge:** Lift your hips off the ground, driving through your foot, while keeping your weight supported on your hand. Your body should form a straight line from your shoulder to your foot.



The Turkish Get-up

- Sweep to Knee: Bring your free leg under your body, so you're kneeling on the ground with your torso upright. Your weight is now supported by your hand, knee and opposite foot.
- Stand Up: Push through your hand and foot to stand up fully, keeping the weight overhead the entire time. Your final position should be standing with the weight locked out overhead, arm fully extended.
- Reverse the Movement: To return to the starting position, reverse the steps: lunge back with your leg, return to the kneeling position, place your free hand on the floor, sweep your leg back out to the side, lower your hips to the ground, and finally, return to lying flat on your back.
- Repeat on the Other Side: Once you've completed the desired number of repetitions on one side, switch the weight to the other arm and repeat the exercise, ensuring balanced development.



The Goblet Squat

- Start by holding a kettlebell close to your chest with both hands, gripping the sides of the handle or holding the globe in your palms, with handle pointing down.
- Stand with your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart, toes pointing slightly outward.
- Keep your chest up, shoulders back, and core engaged throughout the movement.
- Lower your body by bending at the hips and knees, keeping your back straight and knees tracking over your toes.
- Descend until your thighs are parallel to the ground or as low as comfortable while maintaining good form.
- Push through your heels to return to the starting position, squeezing your glutes at the top.
- Maintain a controlled pace and focus on proper form throughout the exercise.



The Clean & Press

- Start with feet shoulder-width apart, kettlebell on the ground between your feet.
- Squat down and grasp the kettlebell handle with an overhand grip.
- Pull the kettlebell back through the legs, similar to a swing.
- Explosively extend your hips and knees, using the momentum to pull the kettlebell up to shoulder height.
- As the kettlebell reaches shoulder height, rotate your wrist and forearm so your thumb is near your chest.
- Press the kettlebell overhead, fully extending your arm.
- Lower the kettlebell back to shoulder height with control.
- Reverse the motion to return the kettlebell into a swing motion through the legs and repeat for rep 2.
- Key coaching points:
 - Keep your core engaged throughout the movement to maintain stability.
 - Use the power generated from your lower body to propel the kettlebell upward.



The Snatch

- Start with the kettlebell between your feet, hinge at the hips, and grasp the handle with one hand.
- Pull the kettlebell back through the legs.
- Forcefully extend your hips, knees, and ankles, while simultaneously pulling the kettlebell upward



- As the kettlebell reaches shoulder height, punch your hand through the handle, allowing the bell to rotate around your wrist.
- Lock out your arm overhead, with the kettlebell resting on the back of your wrist, elbow fully extended.
- Arc the kettlebell back down making sure not to let it drop and repeat for the desired number of reps.
- Maintain a neutral spine throughout the movement and engage your core.



The Windmill

- Start by standing with your feet wider than hip-width apart, holding a kettlebell in one hand overhead.
- Keep your arm straight and press the kettlebell up towards the ceiling.
- Engage your core and hinge at the hips, lowering your torso towards the opposite side while keeping the kettlebell directly overhead.
- Keep your eyes on the kettlebell throughout the movement to maintain proper alignment.
- Maintain a slight bend in the knees and keep your back straight as you lower your torso.
- Pause briefly at the bottom, then return to the starting position by driving through your hips and straightening up.
- Repeat for the desired number of repetitions, then switch sides.
- Remember to start with a lighter weight to master the technique before progressing to heavier kettlebells. Focus on smooth, controlled movements and maintain proper form throughout the exercise.



The Halo

- Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and engage your core.
- Hold the kettlebell by the horns with both hands close to your chest.
- Keep your elbows slightly bent throughout the movement.
- Slowly circle the kettlebell around your head in a controlled motion.
- Maintain a steady pace and keep your shoulders relaxed.
- Reverse direction after completing the desired number of repetitions.
- Focus on proper form and avoid arching your back or leaning excessively.



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Chapter 6: Troubleshooting and Common Mistakes

Identifying and correcting form errors

- Neutral wrist. In almost all kettlebell movements, maintaining neutral wrist alignment with the forearm is considered “correct” and important to maintain. So try to avoid any flexion or extension at the wrist joint.
- Slamming. If you find the kettlebell slamming in to your wrist in movements such as cleans and snatches then there are some technique issues for you to address. While there will always be a slight impact upon contact that can often leave a mark for novice lifters, this is not something that you should allow to persist. The tissue should adapt to minor contacts but we also need to minimise the amount of impact force as you receive the kettlebell. This is usually due to a timing issue and not being active enough in the turnover. You need to forcefully manipulate the KB by punching through as you turn it over. If you wait for the kettlebell to drop on to your wrist the impact will be much greater. It will take some practice but if you are patient it will save you some unsightly bruises.

Proper Form

Take your time to learn the correct techniques. It may be humbling at first, using lighter weights than you'd have imagined, but it will pay off long term. Learning to move the kettlebell efficiently will help your performance.

Further considerations

Three key aspects to steer clear of in any training regimen are plateauing, overtraining, and injury. To prevent hitting a plateau, employ progressive overload by gradually intensifying your training over time. Increasing volume, weight, or complexity are common methods for achieving this progression. To avoid overtraining, it's vital to advance gradually and sustainably. Incorporate rest days into your training week, prioritize adequate sleep and nutrition, and schedule a deload week every 6-8 weeks where you reduce either load or volume. Introducing exercise variations can also help manage this, but aim to wait around 6 weeks before making changes to allow for adaptations. While entirely preventing injuries is challenging, adhering to the aforementioned advice and maintaining overall good practices can lower the risk. However, injury prevention can't be guaranteed, as accidents do occur. Listen to your body, back off when warning signs arise, and consult a healthcare professional if an injury develops.

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Chapter 4: Structuring Your Kettlebell Workouts

Designing a kettlebell workout program

This is where you get the freedom to craft your own workout plan. Start by mastering the swing and tgu, then squat and cõj. Snatch is a more advanced movement, so only progress on to this after mastering the others. Windmill and Halo are often used as warm-up exercises with light weights Each movement should ideally be done more than once a week, if using kettlebells with other fitness modalities, focus initially on 1-2 kettlebell movements. 3-5 sets of each movement per workout is a good place to start, choose your reps according to the weight you have available to you and your specific fitness goals.

Progression and variation in kettlebell training

Progressing with kettlebells can be done a number of ways. But movement proficiency always comes first. Once you are competent, typically you would increase the amount of volume. Either by adding sets or reps once you have reached the upper limit of your goals (strength, endurance, etc), start back at square 1 with a heavier kettlebell.

The possibilities are endless for variations in kettlebell training. Newer more complex moves, double kettlebell movements and linking movements together for “flows” for complex routines. The sky is the limit

Tips for effective recovery and rest

Allow rest days throughout the week. Try to stick to no more than 2 workout days back to back, especially in the early days. Every 4-8 weeks take a deload week.

Where you will reduce the weights or the volume to let your body recover.

Sometimes life throws these in for you, like a family holiday for example where you don't train at all. But if there are no natural breaks, be sure to add in some deloads.

Strategically placing these in your program is the best way to do this, normally at the end of a program or after achieving a short term goal or progression.

Incorporating kettlebell training for specific goals (strength, endurance, fat loss)

Design your training around your goals. While kettlebell training may differ slightly to regular resistance training many of the same principles still apply. To get strong you need to lift heavy weights for low reps and sets. To build muscle, slightly lighter weight for slightly more volume and for endurance lower the weight and increase the reps further. Same as always, fat loss is mainly done in the kitchen, so if you wish to lose weight you will need to adjust your calorie intake accordingly. The same for building muscle calorie and protein intake must be supportive of hypertrophy.

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Chapter 5: Advanced Kettlebell Techniques

Complex kettlebell movements

We have only covered the fundamentals in this eBook, but many other movements exist. As well as completely new moves, another way to increase difficulty is to increase complexity to existing movements. Variations on the movements covered in this eBook are almost endless so another book would be needed for intermediate lifters. But just so you get the idea, the first go to would be the single arm kettlebell swing. One kettlebell held with one arm to perform the swing. This can be done for multiple reps on each side or you can alternate arms every rep while maintaining the “flow”. As you can see the kettlebell is an extremely versatile tool.

Double kettlebell exercises

As mentioned previously many of the movements can be performed with two kettlebells, swing, squat, C&P, snatch all work well with a double kettlebell set up. Double kettlebell proves more challenging beyond the obvious potential increase in weight. Even with weight equated 2 x 12kg rather than 1 x 24kg will prove more difficult. Firstly the weight will be less stable due to not being “locked in” with both hands. Also more coordination is required to move the weight evenly on both sides. Plus, kettlebells are large, using two becomes much more awkward.

Kettlebell flows and combinations

Much like the clean and press is two movements seamlessly linked together, you can add on as many movements as you wish. For example, single arm swing - clean and press - lunge. These flows can be done as creatively as you decide, linking as many movements together as you choose.

Final thoughts

Kettlebell training can be very technical with some movements taking a long time to master. While you should spend time learning proper techniques, this should not be seen as a barrier to getting started. The most important thing you can do to remain safe, is to not do too much, too soon for too long. Start light, low reps, light weights and take rest days. So go out and enjoy the process. Happy kettlebelling!

