



Kettlebell Training

Ring up an all-body workout

by PJ Wren



I have a confession to make. I suffer from what I call Exercise Attention Deficit Disorder (EADD). In an effort to stay motivated and moving, I always try new activities and workout tools. One tool that I've recently implemented in both my clients' and my own workouts is a kettlebell.

My standard four to six week attention span before I grow bored of a sport or game has made me the "Jill of all trades, master of none" queen of the sporting world. Now this isn't quite as bad as Exercise Avoidance Syndrome (EAS)—a condition that afflicts my loving husband—but it does present some challenges.

If you suffer from either one of these problems, kettlebells might also provide you with a way to change up your exercise routine and avoid boredom.

The history

Kettlebells are not new. They originated in Russia in the 1700s and are still used by the Russian and American militaries. Made popular by the Russian strength and flexibility coach Pavel Tsatsouline, kettlebells are starting to pop up in gyms and personal training studios. You can even see them being tossed around on the popular television show *The Biggest Loser*.

A traditional kettlebell is a black cast-iron weight that looks like a cannonball with a handle. But, if that is too hardcore looking for you, you can also buy coloured, neoprene-covered bells—even pink-coloured ones, if that's what strikes your fancy.

Coordinated strength

Kettlebells are a great workout tool to gain functional strength, endurance, and explosive power. From a personal trainer's perspective, kettlebell training is one of the best tools on the market for core conditioning.

In the fitness industry, we are not big fans of abdominal crunches as a way of training for a powerful core. The simple act of rolling one's shoulder blades off a mat will not train all the deep muscles of the abdominals, hips, glutes, and the lower spine to stabilize the rest of your body.

Now grab onto a kettlebell and start squatting with it or swinging it, and you have a different story on your hands. The body, in particular those core muscles mentioned, must now work together to stabilize the torso as well as to initiate the movement. You are now training what we like to call functional and coordinated strength.

Since all of the exercises are performed in a standing or lengthened position, you really get an opportunity to train your core muscles to be strong and stable. These important traits will help you excel not only in sport, but in life's daily activities as well.

One-Legged Deadlift

- Hold the kettlebell with your right hand and lift your left foot slightly behind you.
- Tighten your glutes and abdominals as if you are bracing for a punch.
- Slowly push your hips back while bending your right leg and descend until your upper body is parallel with the floor. Your left leg should rise up behind you.
- Let the bell touch the ground, then straighten back up by driving the hips forward.
- Keep your glutes tight and try not to let the left leg touch the floor.
- Come back up until the right leg is fully extended, tightening the quadricep muscles to straighten the knee.
- Aim for 10 to 15 reps and then switch arms and legs.

Kettlebell Swing

- Grab onto the kettlebell with both hands and stand with your feet wider than your shoulders.
- Squat down until your thighs are nearly parallel with the floor; immediately swing the bell in between the legs.
- As you come out of your squat, swing the bell up to shoulder height, using the hips to push the bell up there.
- That's one rep—try 15 to 20 in a controlled manner.

Squat and Press

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart and the kettlebell resting in your hand at shoulder height, on the outside of the forearm (your palm should be facing you).
- Pull your shoulders back and down and squat rearward until your thighs are parallel with the floor.
- As you come back out of the squat, press the bell up. Use the momentum of coming out of the squat to help drive the bell up and above the head.
- Bring the bell back to shoulder height and perform again.
- Perform 10 to 15 repetitions with one arm and switch arms.

Turkish Half Get-Up

- Lie face up on the floor with both legs straight, holding onto the kettlebell with your right hand straight above the shoulder.
- Bend your left knee, place your foot on the floor, and extend your left arm out by your side.
- Prop yourself up by using your abdominals and your left arm, while keeping the bell directly above the right shoulder and sit up until your back is straight. Keep your eyes on the bell throughout.

- Reverse the movement to return back to the starting position on your back.
- Perform 10 to 15 reps with your right arm extended and then switch arms.

Safety tips

Because kettlebell movements tend to be explosive and powerful in nature, it is important that you respect the kettlebell. If not, you may end up a kettlebell fatality instead of a kettlebell champion.

Follow these safety tips when using a kettlebell:

- Practise all movements without a kettlebell at first.
- If you can, get instruction from a professional trainer.
- When you are ready, start with a light kettlebell (see "Buying guide" sidebar).
- Modify your lever length and your speed if needed (master the technique with a slower speed to start, or hold the weight closer to the body to make it easier).
- Give yourself enough space. Some of the movements involve swinging and you don't want to send your workout partner to the ER with a concussion.
- Warm up before you begin to get the muscles ready for the workout.
- Keep it simple. I have been training with kettlebells for over a year now and there are still some exercises that I know I am not ready for.
- Wear gloves, or keep a towel handy. Your hands do sweat and sweaty hands can mean disaster when throwing a kettlebell around.

Buying guide

- If you are a healthy male, it is suggested that you start with a 35 lb (16 kg) kettlebell. For women a 17 lb (8 kg) one will do the trick.
- You may also want to purchase the next size down and the next size up to those weights. This enables you to choose the right weight, dependent on the exercise that you are doing.
- When purchasing a kettlebell, you only need to buy one. Unlike dumbbells, kettlebells are worked individually.
- Try to avoid ordering kettlebells over the Internet. Because of their weight you will pay a hefty fee for shipping and handling. Most fitness stores carry them