

Kettlebell Introduction

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(Ron Jones, MS-LLC, ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor, Corporate Wellcoach)



History: Kettlebells (KBs) are not new; they have been around for over 300 hundred years. KBs originated in Russia and have been used for generations by their athletes and military units. KBs are made out of solid iron and look like a cannonball with a thick handle on top. They have a small flat spot on the bottom to prevent rolling when placed on the ground. Basic KBs are painted black. Better KBs are painted with a thicker industrial paint that is chip resistant or vinyl coated. Today, KBs are being used for multiple populations from rehab and weight loss to military special forces. Basically, all of the KBs do the same thing Comrades...provide a great **whole-body power workout!**

Weight Ranges: KBs generally range from 4kg (9 lbs) to 36kg (79 lbs). *Elite KBs can exceed 100 pounds but very few can handle these monsters!* The most common weights are 8-24kg. Standard weight for women is 12kg (26 lbs) and 24kg (53 lbs) for men; however, this can be heavy for many people not experienced with KB workouts. Introductory weights are usually 8kg (18 lbs) for women and 16kg (35 lbs) for men. **As always, only use weight that can be controlled safely!**

Cost: KBs cost more than dumbbells, but in reality, KBs are far more cost efficient and versatile than standard dumbbells and Olympic weights. KBs basically last forever. *There is nothing to wear out!* If you had four pairs of KBs in different weight ranges, you could keep yourself very busy for a long time! In general, expect to pay between \$2.00-\$4.50/pound depending upon weight range and supplier. Be sure to consider shipping costs if ordering on-line. For corporate clients, I prefer the vinyl-coated/color-coded **1st Place Kettlebells from PerformBetter.Com**. You can order them on-line and have them shipped for less than you can buy them locally or through other on-line suppliers. The 1st Place KBs are high quality with finished handles. Official RKC KBs are not vinyl-coated and have larger diameter handles plus a little more expensive too.

Assessing Readiness: You'll need clean squat mechanics and a full range of motion without pain in your shoulders to successfully begin a general KB program. It's possible to adapt lighter KBs for rehabilitation purposes, but this is a different application and focus than my KB Introduction. Face-the-Wall Squats are great to test your readiness!

Joint Mobility & Preparation: I'd recommend doing my complete **Dynamic Warm-Up** which is great for the whole body and improving general movement patterns. In addition, *KBs require more preparation specifically targeting shoulders, wrists, and ankles.* A quality dynamic warm-up preparation for KBs should take about ten minutes and cover all joints of the body.

Footwear: One major principle and two key points on feet. Principle! It is critical with KBs to get the right force transfer from the core of the body STRAIGHT into the ground and STRAIGHT back *(Note Newton's Three Laws of Motion). The ability to apply the "hard lockout" to your core and pelvic floor will put more punch into your KB movements. The correct footwear will also enhance more efficient force transfer. If you don't have a clean transfer of force from Point A to Point B, you create what is called a "force leak." Force leaks are manifested as lateral movements and wobbling or softness in the body that robs you of power...*which basically means you will not move as well or as fast.* On footwear specifics, *two key points are shoes and no shoes.* Ideally, you have NO shoes on a rubber mat surface that has minimal give. Yes, your feet will work VERY hard to stabilize the KBs without shoe support! Shoes today make our feet weak, so barefoot

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KB workouts are good for them. If you wear shoes, opt for hard soled shoes like wrestling shoes, power lifting shoes, or just keep it simple with the old-school Converse All-Star shoes with hard soles. All the shoes above have hard soles that won't absorb or leak much force.

DVD: *Enter the Kettlebell! by Russian KB Guru Pavel Tsatsouline is an absolute must if you are serious about learning proper KB training.* He covers all the basic movements, safety, a few biomechanical assessment tips along with a bonus chapter on how KBs are actually made which is really interesting.

Exercise Progressions: There is a sequence in learning proper KB movement patterns and exercises. There are hundreds of different KB exercises and combinations, but only a handful are truly "foundational." Keep it simple to begin—and clean. Follow the order below. Carefully master each movement pattern and specific exercise before moving to the next. *Note that one will lead into the next and that they all relate back to each other to create the closest thing to fighting you can experience without fighting—The simple yet highly effective Kettlebell!*

Mental ☹ *Comrades!* KBs require much more concentration to properly activate. If you don't mean it—don't pick up the KB! If you don't want to stay focused in the moment on high quality—don't pick up the KB! If you can lockout your mind to distractions while locking out your core—pick up the KB and begin to improve NOW!

Foundational Kettlebell Exercises	Technical Notes
0. <i>HARD-STYLE LOCKOUT!!!</i>	Before you can even pick up the KB and begin, you must know how to apply muscle tension and lockout your core!
1. Deadlift	Use Face-the-Wall and Box Squats to assess and correct any compensations. Progress to KB deadlift. Use HARD LOCKOUT to finish squats, deadlifts, and exercise progressions below!
2. Swing	Use deadlift pattern without rounding back as you "hike" KB between legs. Swing back up to eye level with hard lockout.
3. Clean	Combine swing with tight arc to rack KB at chest level with hard lockout and packed shoulder.
4. Press	Combine swing and clean to press KB straight up over shoulder with hard lockout and packed shoulder.
5. Turkish Get Up (TGU)	Use foundational KB strength from above to work whole body while emphasizing shoulder stability and finishing with hard lockout—keep shoulders packed throughout.
6. High Pull	Combine swing and TGU shoulder stability to explosively pull KB back towards upper shoulder with hard lockout.
7. Snatch	Combine all the ability gained from above for this whole body test of power. Swing then explosively high pull and punch the KB straight over shoulder with hard lockout.

References: Delaine Ross (GymCondition.Com), David Whitley (IronTamer.Com), Pavel Tsatsouline (DragonDoor.Com), Dr. Mark Cheng (KettlebellsLosAngeles.Com). * **Ron Jones (10.7.08)**