

Kettlebell Introduction

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(Ron Jones, MS, RKC, ACSM Health Fitness Specialist, 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, and some are vinyl coated. Today, KBs are being used for multiple populations from rehab and weight loss to military Special Forces. If used properly, KBs can correct dysfunctional movement patterns while also providing 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 "entry-level" corporate clients, I prefer the vinyl-coated/color-coded **1st Place Kettlebells from PerformBetter.Com**. You can probably order them on-line and have them shipped for less than you can buy them locally. Official RKC KBs are not vinyl-coated, have larger diameter handles, and a little more expensive. For my personal use, I only train with Dragon Door RKC kettlebells.

Assessing Readiness: To take my KB 101 Workshop, you'll need a base of fitness, decent squat mechanics, and a full range of motion without pain in your shoulders. I recommend the same to successfully begin a general KB program on your own. This is NOT extreme fitness—just the basics! It's possible to adapt KBs for rehabilitation purposes, but this is a different application and focus than my KB 101 Introduction.

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: 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 correct footwear will 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 shoes vs. 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 KB workouts are good for them.

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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. Another alternative are *Vibram Five Fingers* which protect the bottom of your feet with thin rubber soles. The "shoe" is more like a glove for your foot with minimal support.

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

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 Russian Kettlebell!*

Mental ☺ Comrades! KBs require much more concentration to safely 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. HARD-STYLE LOCKOUT!!!	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. Goblet Squat	Use Deadlift position to pick up KB by horns. Hold KB close to chest. Maintain good posture. Descend into deep squat while keeping KB close to chest and elbows inside of knees, pause to feel hips stretch, then use good mechanics to come out of bottom position with glutes into lockout.
3. Swing	Use deadlift pattern without rounding back as you "hike" KB between legs. Swing back up to chest level with hard lockout.
4. Clean	Combine swing with tight arc to rack KB at chest level with hard lockout and packed shoulder.
5. Press	Combine swing and clean to press KB straight up over shoulder with hard lockout and packed shoulder.
6. Turkish Get Up (TGU)	Use foundational KB strength from above to work whole body while emphasizing both shoulder mobility and stability—keep shoulders packed throughout.
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.

* Ron Jones (10.9.09)