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Kettlebell Training Explained

Kettlebells aren't simply a new fad. At the most basic level, they are essentially weight-lifting, or resistance training; and can be used in much the same way as 'traditional' lifting.



Where kettlebells come into their own, though, is the nature of the design. Kettlebells are off-centre – that is to say, the main bulk of the weight is always a little further away from the body than is the case with dumbbells, or barbells.

Normal gym-work teaches us to keep control and always know where the weight is; kettlebells take that concept and throw it out of the window. The whole point of kettlebell training is that your body *doesn't* always know where the weight is, and as a consequence your muscles have fight to keep stability and control.

This constant battle for stability is at the heart of what any kettlebell enthusiast will tell you – they're fantastic for core development, both appearance AND strength. A training tool that gives you an impressive midsection as a by-product? Now we're talking...!

So, if KBs are so great, why doesn't everyone train with them? Well, like anything, it comes down to your individual goals. Want to be a 200lb, 8% body fat bodybuilder? You're not going to build enough muscle solely with kettlebells to hit that goal. Need to drop from 300lbs to a 'normal' weight for your size? Again, kettlebells are unlikely to help; you're unlikely to have the range of movement and basic fitness levels to make the best of them.

So who are kettlebells perfect for? In my opinion as a PT, the list below are the kind of people who will get the most out of kettlebell training:

- Anyone looking to lose body fat
- Women seeking to gain a 'toned' appearance who have no interest in traditional weight-training
- Regular gym-goers who wish to build muscle whilst keeping body-fat levels under control
- Almost any person involved in a sport that demands a good level of CV conditioning
- Anyone who has ever used the simple phrase 'I just want to get fitter'
- Strength trainers who rarely venture into higher rep ranges

- Anyone who takes part in endurance activities (including marathons, 10ks, etc)

When you first start training with a kettlebell, as with anything new, take it easy! There's no rush, no need to fly into the latest high-impact routine that will leave you feeling like a car crash victim for days afterwards. All the key, basic, big moves in kettlebell training start with the '[swing](#)'. Master this first, getting both the 'half squat' movement AND the 'straight back' spot-on before graduating to more complex moves. Like with any new sport or training method, get the basics right first and you'll avoid wasting time (and avoid potential injuries) further down the line. I'd recommend you then learn the [kettlebell snatch](#) and the [clean and press](#).

After you have these mastered, you'll have a good appreciation of kettlebell work, and can start getting to grips with some more complicated moves, and begin to incorporate body weight exercises as well to create some of the most demanding circuits you'll ever do.

If you're completely new to any kind of structured weight training, I'd suggest starting with a 4kg (females) or a 12kg (males). This is obviously a very broad generalisation, but it's based on my personal training experience and it goes against the usually recommended 8kg for females, and 16kg for males. I've seen regular gym-goers utterly humbled by a 16kg KB; and there's nothing like annihilating your confidence to put you off trying something that could otherwise be perfect for you. Similarly,

women new to training often are simply incapable of pressing an 8kg weight above their heads, and to insist they just try harder is demoralising (not to mention ignorant of the trainer!)

If you're used to the gym, and are capable of body-weight equivalent lifts (in the squat, bench press, and chin-ups for example) then by all means dive in at the higher end of the starting range; but don't be surprised if a 16kg KB feels a LOT heavier than the equivalent dumbbell. Just for reference, it is often cited that a 16kg kettlebell, at the bottom of a 'swing', actually weighs nearly three times the weight because of the momentum generated, and the force needing to be applied to slow it down. Worth bearing in mind...!



To sum up, kettlebells can introduce a whole new level to your training. If you're a complete newbie to fitness, they are a genuinely fun and interesting way to get some excellent, quick results. If you're more seasoned, you're still very likely to find even the most basic routine a good new challenge, and will be surprised to uncover some weaknesses (and strengths!) that you didn't know you had.

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