

# Integrating Kettlebells into Your Training

*Combines both strength & cardio training*

**By John Platero**

A properly designed kettlebell training routine combines the aspects of both strength and cardio training within a single workout. Performing distinct kettlebell workouts with little or no rest not only builds muscle endurance and strength, but also forces the body to work at a high heart rate for a cardiovascular benefit.

Kettlebell use focuses on muscle integration rather than isolation, incorporating multi-joint, full body movements. Nearly every drill recruits multiple muscle groups to work in unison. The body is trained as a whole and particular emphasis is focused on the core and back muscles.

Kettlebell training ironically doesn't even require kettlebells to experience some of the philosophy surrounding it. There is quite a variety of kettlebell drills. Many of the more advanced drills simply aren't possible to perform with a dumbbell. If you don't have a

kettlebell two of the most basic, fundamental drills can be experienced (to some degree) with a dumbbell.

The handle on a kettlebell allows the user to swing it around. Keep in mind the concept of momentum. Momentum is mass times velocity. The faster the kettlebell is moving, the more stress or force it creates on the user. This can have a positive or negative effect depending on the your structural integrity, fitness level and experience. Always begin conservatively and progress slowly allowing time for adaptation.

Here are four kettlebell exercises that you can integrate in to your training.

### Pushup with One-Arm Row

This exercise involves both a push and a twist. You may see people perform this exercise with only one kettlebell but it puts additional stress on the non-kettlebell elbow. Start with each hand on a kettlebell. This exercise may be uncomfortable for some at

the base of the hand, however, the kettlebell does lower the stress on the wrist in a pushup by allowing the wrist to remain in neutral and not go so far into extension.

**Start:** Get into a push-up position with the feet in a wider than normal stance. Place each hand on a kettlebell.

**Action:** Perform a pushup. At the top of the motion, tighten your core and with the one arm, row the kettlebell as far as you can without rotating your core.

**Breathing:** In the pushup, inhale on the way down, and then exhale on the way up. As you row, inhale once again, and then exhale as you return the kettlebell to the floor.

### Kettlebell Swing

**Start:** Begin in a wide stance, with the feet 1.5 times shoulder width and toes pointing slightly outward. This is important to allow for the kettlebell to swing backward and for stability during the upper portion of the lift. Squat down with your spine in alignment and lift the weight to an erect posture with your shoulders back. Now, you're ready to begin. Keep your head straight and look across the room while you perform the exercise.

**Action:** To initiate the movement, squat down (pushing your hips back) until the kettlebell is well clear of your groin. Flick the kettlebell back between your legs with your arm. This is the only time you use your arms to push the weight. At this position in the swing, your forearms are against your groin and the kettlebell is between your legs extending behind you. At this point, you will simultaneously squat up and thrust your pelvis forward. This is the key element of the kettlebell swing. It should be the hips moving the weight, not the arms. This thrust should cause you to stand up and straighten as the kettlebell propels forward. Aim for chest height. Simply repeat this action for additional repetitions.

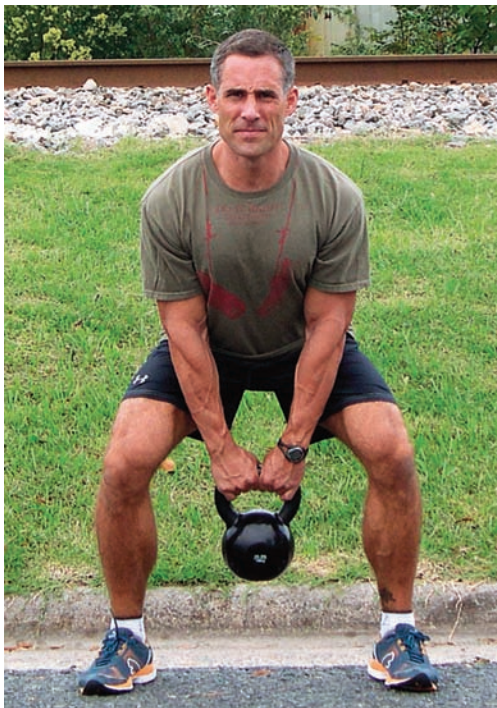
**Breathing:** Exhale as you swing the weight and inhale on the way down.

### Variations

**Single-handed Swing:** The single handed swing targets the muscles a little differently because it is unilateral and the body rotates a little to balance the weight. The single-handed swing is easy to do after mastering the double swing. Remember to align the weight in the center so it does not bang into your thigh.

**Swapping hands:** When the kettlebell swings to the highest point, it will pause for a brief moment before it swings back down again. During this pause, you can change hands. It's recommend to practice this outdoors or in a safe area.

**Rope swing:** Athletes from a weight training background may experience some difficulty allowing their arms to remain pas-



sive in an exercise and tend to lift the kettlebell with their arms. A short towel or rope tied around the kettlebell is a good tool to teach proper form. When you swing the kettlebell, the rope should be in line with the arms. If the rope is not aligned, the exercise is being done incorrectly. Make sure the rope isn't too long so that the kettlebell does not bang onto the ground.

### Clean and Press

**Start:** This exercise can be done with one hand or two. Straddle the kettlebells with the feet shoulder width apart. Squat down with arms extended and grasp the kettlebell handles with an overhand grip. Position the shoulders over the kettlebells with the spine in alignment, butt pointing downward and trunk almost perpendicular to the ground.

**Action:** Without using or bending your arms, pull the kettlebells up off the floor by extending your hips and knees. As the kettlebells reach knee height, vigorously elevate your shoulders while keeping the kettlebells close to your thighs. When the kettlebells pass your mid-thigh, jump upward extending your body. Pull the kettlebells upward with both the upper trapezius and arms, allowing your elbows to move out, but keep the kettlebells close to body. Aggressively move under the kettlebells as if you were almost pulling yourself under the kettlebells.

While moving into a mini-squat position, catch the kettlebells on the top of your shoulders rotating the arm under the kettlebells and then catching it on the backside of the forearm with a straight wrist. Hitting the bottom of the squat, stand up immediately. To press the weight, drive upward with the legs, lifting the kettlebells off the forearm and extending the kettlebells overhead.

To return to the floor, bend your knees slightly and slowly lower the kettlebells with the

spine and wrist in alignment. Decelerate the decent of the squat to absorb the weight of the falling kettlebells.

**Breathing:** Inhale before you lift the kettlebells then exhale slowly as you lift. Inhale again as you lower the weight.

### Front Squats

**Start:** Stand with feet shoulder width or slightly wider. The toes should be pointed straight ahead or slightly outward. Clean the kettlebells so that both hands are facing each other. The elbows should be pointing outward and the kettlebells should be resting on each shoulder.

**Action:** The movement is initiated by moving the hips back and bending the knees and hips to lower the torso and accompanying weight, then returning to the upright position.

The squat can continue to a number of depths depending on the goal, but a correct squat should be close to parallel to the ground. By "hinging at the hip" the squat is much safer on the knees. The muscles around the hips provide the power out of the bottom.

Some common errors include:

- Descending too rapidly.
- Flexing the torso too far forward. Over-flexing the torso greatly increases the forces exerted on the lower back, risking a spinal disc herniation.
- The knee not aligning with the direction of the toes. The knee should remain over the first two toes at the bottom of the motion. Have your toes slightly pointed out in order to track the knee properly.
- Don't forget the wrist. It should be held straight in neutral alignment.
- Don't look down or upward. Keep head facing forward and eyes looking ahead.

**Breathing:** Inhale on the way down and exhale on the way up.

Here is a sample circuit utilizing these four exercises:

Perform 25 repetitions (depending on the goal) of each exercise with no rest in between each exercise.

Kettlebell Front Squat  
 Pushups  
 Kettlebell Two Arm Swings  
 Kettlebell Clean and Press  
 V-Up  
 Mountain Climbers  
 Kettlebell Pushup with One Arm Row

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