

[IMAGE]

Old-School Fitness

By Jeffrey Tucker, DC, DACRB

Flip through the television channels on an average day, especially first thing in the morning or late at night, and you'll see the latest, "greatest" fitness routines, techniques and tools designed to sculpt your body. Do they work any better than the "old-school" methods people have been using successfully for generations? Here's a time-tested fitness strategy that's been around for centuries and remains popular today among exercise enthusiasts looking for simple, effective ways to get in shape: *kettlebells*.

There is a lot of excitement and "buzz" in gyms, fitness centers and in the rehabilitation setting these days about a piece of exercise equipment called the *kettlebell*. I want to introduce everyone to this exercise tool because kettlebell workouts are more fun than traditional weight machines and free-weight dumbbells, and you can engage a lot of your major muscle groups simultaneously, allowing you to improve strength, balance and endurance.

Personal trainer Chelsea Cooper. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark A *kettlebell* or *girya* is a traditional Russian cast iron weight that looks like a cannonball with a handle. Picture a bowling ball with a handle on it. The kettlebell dates back four centuries; the word first appeared in a Russian dictionary in 1704. So popular were kettlebells in Tsarist Russia that any strongman or weight-lifter was referred to as a *girevik* or "kettlebell man."

Before you get frightened by an image of a hulking, muscled bodybuilder, bear in mind that kettlebells come in various weights - from as light as 5, 8 or 10 lbs to as heavy as 105 lbs. In short, you can use kettlebells to achieve the level of fitness you desire, just as you would with conventional free weights and other types of workout equipment. And a quick search of the Web reveals that these days, you aren't limited to the traditional iron "bowling ball" variety; you can even find kettlebells that are essentially medicine balls with handles.

You can do standard weight training exercises with kettlebells: bench presses, military presses, rows and squats. However, the unique value of kettlebells is derived from ballistic (fast exercise) work: snatches, swings, cleans and jerks. Consistent kettlebell exercises can be used to improve physical appearance,

enhance cardiovascular health, decrease pain, prevent injury, reduce body fat, and increase lean muscle mass, strength, endurance, flexibility and performance.

I personally became intrigued by the claims of the advantages of the kettlebell to improve all-round fitness, enhance awareness of posture, body position, explosiveness, breath and grip, so I decided I wanted to learn how to use them. I met with a well-known kettlebell expert and took workshops from him. I also met with the person responsible for popularizing kettlebells in the U.S. He taught me some of his stretching routines. I soon found out that kettlebells are all they're cracked up to be (and more), and you don't need to purchase expensive exercise equipment or join a gym.

I especially like the cardio benefits people can get from kettlebells. It's easy to use interval training principles with kettlebells (doing an exercise fast, then slow, and repeating). I have been teaching a twice-weekly exercise class for the past four years and when I first started, we used just body-weight exercises, balance balls and bands. Every year since I started the class I've introduced a new, more challenging, tool or device.

In January 2008, I started using kettlebells in my exercise classes. I only have women in my classes and these women are noticing better changes in body composition than anything else we were doing in the past. Kettlebells are helping these women tone and tighten their shoulders, back muscles, arms, forearms, midsection and legs.

Here is a short list of workout equipment the kettlebell can replace: barbells, dumbbells, belts for weighted pull-ups and dips, thick bars, lever bars, medicine balls, grip devices, and cardio equipment. Two or three different-size kettlebells are all you need. Non-injured patients and clients familiar with weight training initially start with a 26 lb or 35 lb kettlebell. Rehab patients usually start with a lighter weight. And kettlebells do not take up much space, so you can train in a small area.

I have always advocated free weights more than machines, because free weights are more functional and duplicate real life. Where else are we sitting down and pushing weights except in a gym? Using kettlebells for exercise is even more fun and functional than dumbbells. I actually think they are much harder to handle than dumbbells - which is a good thing in the long run, because they will challenge your body. Kettlebell handles are generally thicker than dumbbells and will give you a vice grip in no time. Also, the off-centered weight of a kettlebell will force you to use more core muscles. Kettlebell training will activate stabilizer muscles, challenge balance and get you to transfer energy from one body segment to another.

Kettlebells - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark One of the most fundamental and popular kettlebell exercises is called the "swings." Repeating the swings over and over helps you learn to generate force from your body's powerhouse: the hips, legs, back and core. Once you have mastered the kettlebell swing, not only will you instantly get the feel and sense of more complex kettlebell lifts, but your body also will innately apply these lessons to your chosen sport, martial art or weight training. Swings make the deadlift functional, get you connected to the ground and transfer energy through the shoulders. Swings involve a snapping action of the hips, and I have found that this movement targets the gluteals better than bridges and are as good as squats.

For sports, you need explosive hips, stable joints, and quick hands. Kettlebell training develops those attributes. Most of the moves are done standing, (bilateral leg stance or single leg stance) and many moves are done lying supine. Multi-joint movements comprise most of the drills. Kettlebells complement core stabilization, body-weight exercises and band exercises. Many exercise maneuvers are characteristic of work, sports and activities of daily living.

Break Up the Routine

One of the biggest mistakes you can make is performing the same fitness routine month after month, year after year. I've heard stories of people who've been doing the same workout for literally years. They do the same exercises, same weights, same workout order, and enjoy the same lack of results. Don't allow yourself to become "process oriented" and just go through the motions at each workout. You have to change your workout program every 8-12 weeks because the body will neutralize the beneficial effects of any exercise protocol to which it is continually subjected. Your body will plateau and you'll stop seeing improvements.

Now, do not get me wrong, going through the motions is better than not doing anything at all, especially if it makes you feel better. However, if you want to make progress and reduce the chances you'll get bored and/or frustrated over time, you have to be results oriented rather than process oriented. That means finding fun, challenging and different ways to exercise. Good luck in your journey toward lifelong health and fitness.

Kettlebells: A Full-Body Workout in Five Easy Steps

When you first start using kettlebells as a primary fitness tool, focus on exercises that provide the most bang for your buck. Break down a full-body workout into five categories: one pressing exercise, one pulling

exercise, one exercise for the quads, one exercise for the hamstrings and one core exercise. This ensures that the entire body is getting a workout and prevents you from focusing too much on one area. For example, in general, men like to focus more on the upper body and women like to focus more on the lower body. To avoid imbalances, focus on working the entire body by picking one exercise per category as follows.

Personal trainer Chelsea Cooper. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Pressing: A pressing exercise will take care of the shoulders, triceps and, depending on which exercise you pick, the chest. The clean and military press is a kettlebell pressing exercise (lift a kettlebell to your chest with one hand and then press it straight up).

Pulling: These exercises are a necessity to ensure balanced development for the upper body. Moreover, there is a synergy between pulling and pressing muscles. The better you get at pulling, the stronger your pressing will be, and vice versa. Renegade rows (one-handed rows from a push-up position) and bent-over rows are excellent pulling exercises.

Quads: You need to work on the legs. Even if you do not care about leg development, you need a strong foundation if you care about upper-body development. Front squats or lunges with the kettlebell held overhead are good quad exercises.

Hamstrings: The next critical area is the back of your legs. You need to balance the quad development from the squats with some hamstring exercises. In addition, if you are an athlete, you need strong hamstrings for explosive strength and speed. Choose the Swing (swinging the kettlebell back through your legs from a squat position and then up to your chest) to build strong hamstrings.

Core: The last important area to cover is the midsection. The core or midsection connects the lower body to the upper body; if your core is weak, so is your entire body. The Turkish get-up, a multi-step exercise that takes you from the ground to your feet and back to the ground again (all while holding a kettlebell straight up in the air) is an excellent exercise for the core.

Not quite sure how to do these exercises correctly? The photos included with this article show the proper start and finish position for each exercise, along with basic performance instructions. For detailed step-by-step instructions, visit www.toyourhealth.com.

Personal trainer Chelsea Cooper demonstrates The Squat with a Kettlebell. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark The Squat **The Squat**

With the kettlebell held as close to the chest as possible, squat down as low as you can. Pause at the bottom before returning to starting position. Keep eyes forward at all times.

Tips: Breathe in as you squat down, and hold your breath as you stand up. (Caution: Clear this with your doctor if you have high blood pressure or any heart problems.) Look straight ahead at all times or look up, but do not look down. Flex your glutes and stomach as hard as possible before rising back up from the bottom position of the front squat. Press the kettlebell into your upper body to keep the kettlebell in place.

Personal trainer Chelsea Cooper demonstrates a Renegade Row with Kettlebells. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Renegade Row **Renegade Row**

Hold two kettlebells in a push-up position shoulder-width apart. Push one kettlebell toward the floor while pulling the other up and back (close to your body). Hold the kettlebell in the working arm in the top position for a second and then lower it under control back to the floor. Switch arms after each repetition.

Personal trainer Chelsea Cooper demonstrates a Clean and Press with a Kettlebell. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Clean and Press **Clean & Press**

Lift (clean) a kettlebell from floor to shoulder height, keeping your elbow close to your core, as if you are a boxer bracing for a punch. Try to touch your elbow to your midsection so you have a strong foundation from which to press. Then press the kettlebell up and out, locking it out slightly behind your head. As the kettlebell passes head height, lean into it slightly so it locks out behind your head. Reverse move to complete.

Personal trainer Chelsea Cooper demonstrates The Swing with a Kettlebell. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark The Swing **The Swing**

Squat with a kettlebell between your feet. Make sure that your back is flat and look straight ahead. Swing the kettlebell between your thighs forcefully. Quickly reverse the direction and drive through with your hips, taking the kettlebell straight out to chest level. Let the kettlebell swing back between your thighs and repeat.

Turkish Get-Up

Personal trainer Chelsea Cooper demonstrates a Turkish Get-Up with a Kettlebell. - Copyright © Stock

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Turkish Get-Up

Personal trainer Chelsea Cooper demonstrates a Turkish Get-Up with a Kettlebell. - Copyright © Stock

Photo / Register Mark Turkish Get-Up Step 1: Lie flat on the floor with a kettlebell straight up over your

head. The movement starts as you release one hand from the kettlebell, keeping your arm flexed straight out.

Step 2: Bend your right knee and roll to the left side, allowing the triceps and then hand of your free arm (in this case the left) to touch the floor. Keep the kettlebell straight at all times.

Step 3: Still keeping the kettlebell straight overhead, use your free (left) hand and opposite (right) leg to drive forward, bringing your left leg in and right leg forward until you are in the bottom position of a lunge.

Step 4: Take a second to gather yourself and then stand up out of the lunge position. You have kept the kettlebell straight up the entire time. Reverse the four steps to return to the starting position.

Tips: Focus on keeping the kettlebell locked out at all times. Flex your stomach and glutes off the floor into the lunge position. Keep your eyes on the kettlebell at each step of the exercise. Make sure to do an even number of reps for each side of the body.

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