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Kettlebell Training

For dads and others with little time
DISCLAIMER

I will keep this short.

This E-book is written to provide information on Kettlebell training. Kettlebells require technique as well as strength and the best way is to start lightly and work your way up. Training hard is good, but save that until you feel that you have the bell under good control. I take no responsibility for any injuries that occur while following this manual. Remember, start slowly, then increase...that is the mantra.

TRAINING PHOTOS: David Hagstrand
Initial words from the Author

This E-book is short, it’s actually more of a booklet. Why? Because it only describes a very limited number of exercises and in addition just some thoughts on nutrition and training. I am of the belief that adding pages with tons of exercises does not really help. It’s like cooking, more ingredients does not necessarily lead to better food. Most two hundred page workout bibles contain so much information (they must have two hundred pages so they can call it a bible) that once you have read it, you are so full of information that you still don’t know what to do with it.

I will tell you exactly what to do to become strong and fit. Nothing more, nothing less. No drivel, no BS, no fillers. Working out this way is for anyone who wants to be a fit, strong guy (or girl). It is not only for dads, but becoming a dad was what triggered my own move from the gym to Kettlebells by adding a new dimension of time constraints in my life. My goal is that you should be training within one hour of starting to read this book. This workout will not make you look like a body builder and it will not make you a champion power lifter. It will, however, melt a lot of fat off your waist (how much depends on what you eat) and it will make you the strongest office worker in the neighborhood. You will be able to slouch as much as you want in your office chair, because you back will be made of steel.

If you feel that you need a two hundred page bible on nutrition and lifting exercises, there are plenty of books out there. I will recommend a few sources at the end of this book if you are interested.

How to read the book

The book(let) is structured in order of importance (order of importance according to me of course, feel free to disagree). Start with the short background info and then move on to the safety part. After that the first exercise will show up. Try it before moving on. Once you feel ready you can continue to read and enjoy the rest.

If you have trouble understanding how to do an exercise, remember that the good old internet has most things you will need. Search for the exercise on Youtube, or read in the last section of this book “Links and suggested reading” for more info.
The two schools of lifting weights

There are of course more than two schools when it comes to weight lifting. Any personal trainer or coach has his own idea about what to lift, how to lift, how much, how often, when, what, why etc. It never ends. Still, drilling down to ways of lifting there are two major ways of doing it: complex or in isolation.

**Isolated lifting**, means that you train one muscle group at the time, often while supporting the rest of your body. For instance you can train your biceps by doing seated curls. This exercise works the biceps but has limited effect on any other part of your body. This method is also commonly referred to as bodybuilding exercises.

**Complex lifting**, means performing an exercise that activates more than one muscle group, for instance a deadlift or a squat. The squat may look like a leg exercise but if you really look at what you have to do to perform a squat you will see it is an exercise for the entire body (given that you use a weight that is at least moderately heavy, that is). If you analyze the squat you notice you will have to work the legs, that is the most obvious part, but in order to not crumble under the weight you will have to keep the bar in position (requires arm and shoulder strength) and keep your body tight (requires core strength). If you perform a heavy squat it will put enormous pressure on you entire body, also on your cardio vascular system.

**Which way is better?**

There really is no better way, only different goals and methods. For bodybuilders the main goal is size, even though they will gain strength in the process. Body builders are not always as strong as they look, but they are rarely weak. Ronnie Coleman has deadlifted over 800 lbs, which puts him on the stronger side of the continuum, to use an understatement. For power lifters the main goal is functional strength, even though these guys will gain muscle mass as well. Perhaps Lifters don’t look as strong on the beach because they rarely care to diet their body fat away.

**Kettlebell basics**

**Why is it so heavy?**

I guess this is the first thing many people ask themselves once they grab a Kettlebell and lift it. It seems heavier than you expect. Why? First of all a Kettlebell usually has a thicker grip than most other work out equipment. This makes it hard to just hold onto it. Second of all, a Kettlebell is asymmetric, it will flip and twist and have its point of gravity outside your hand which just makes it a rebellious piece of iron. It is very difficult to balance it comfortably like you can do with a dumbbell.

**Lifting Kettlebells**

When lifting Kettlebells there are two different types of exercises in focus. There are low repetition lifts to make you increase your maximal strength (how hard your muscles can contract) and there are dynamic exercises, mostly performed at high repetitions that will build strength as well, but mostly kill your cardio (you will soon try one).
You could of course use a Kettlebell like any dumbbell and perform rear deltoid lateral lifts, Triceps kickbacks, biceps curls etc. It will require you to get a dozen different bells though and perhaps then it is just as well that you sign up with the local gym or buy a variable weight dumbbell.

I use only a few complex exercises when I work out with a Kettlebell. It requires only one Kettlebell, with an upgrade as you get stronger, and it is fast. They will not make you the most bulky guy on the beach, but it will make you strong and give you great endurance. Not to mention a slender, strong, well shaped body.

**Priority 1, safe training**
Throwing a Kettlebell around is not something you want to do wrong. That can get you hurt. So please check this list before you start.

- Make sure you have enough space around you, especially check that the kids are out of the way. This sounds like an obvious thing, but the amount of Nintendo Wii injuries tell a different story.
- Make sure you stand on a flat surface where you could drop the Kettlebell if something goes wrong (you don’t want to break you back just because you tried to save the kitchen floor)
- Work out barefoot, or wear shoes without cushioning. I prefer no shoes at all.
- Start slow. Kettlebells do not only require strength but also good technique. Getting the hang of this technique may take a little while. Besides that, if you feel yesterday's workout was too easy, you can always increase. Better that then not being able to get out of bed.
- Keep your back straight at all times, and never bend backwards.
- Read the section below on body tension.

**What is tension?**
Tension is needed to safely be able to work with Kettlebells, or lift any heavy weight for that matter. But what is it? It is also referred to as staying tight or scientifically as intra-abdominal pressure. It means that you pressurize your torso. In this way the weight will not just put pressure on your spine but your entire torso will be tight and support the weight. Leaving holding a heavy weight to the spine is a really bad idea.

This may be an awkward metaphor but I think it is a good one. Imagine sitting down on the toilet for some serious business. Your abdomen will create pressure to get things moving. If you make sure to keep your sphinxer shut, your entire upper body will be pressurized and stay this way until you exhale (or you open the other end, but that is not to prefer when working out)

Check the info in the section "links and suggested reading" if you want to know more.

**Tension is good, why?**
First, because when pressing a weight that will try to put pressure on your back, keeping your upper body tense will protect the back.

Second, it will make it easier to lift the weight. Compare lifting a friend who tenses all his muscles with the same friend being completely relaxed. Which one is easier to lift? You could also try comparing doing one pull up hanging like a sack of potato from the bar or while tensing all muscles in your body. Noticed any difference? In short, a tight body is a strong body. Keep tight.
Workout 1, getting used to the bell

To get started with Kettlebell training I would suggest you stay with one exercise only, the Swing. If you are somewhat like me you may think “but there is no real lifting involved in this exercise, how would this alone make me fit?” True, but there is maximal explosion in large parts of the body involved, especially the hips, and once you drop the bell down between your legs there is considerable braking involved that will put pressure on your entire body as well. Try it now!! And remember to stretch you hamstrings afterwards, you will thank me for that tip.

The Swing

Make sure you pick the bell up safely. Never bend your back, it should always stay straight (that does not mean it needs to stay vertical, you can still bend in the hips). Stand up straight will the bell in front of you.

From this stance, bend your knees and bend in the hips to let the bell swing back between your legs. Make sure the back is straight.
Stand up straight in one explosive movement, pushing your hips forward as hard and as fast as you can. Let the bell swing up in front of your face on straight arms. Try to keep your shoulders relaxed and make sure to stand up straight, don’t bend backwards.

Let the bell drop using gravity. Don’t try to brake it on its way down. Let the bell swing back between your legs and then brake with your entire body. You will have to absorb all the kinetic energy from the bell and this means bending your legs as well as using your upper body to keep your back straight. The bell will try to bend your back. If you have problems from the start already to brake the bell with good form, the bell is too heavy. Try to swing the bell less high or get a lighter one.

Once the bell is back between your legs, explode again. Repeat until tired!

The Swing can be done with two or one hand. Feel free to experiment. Using two hands feels less heavy but if your hands are the first thing that gives in this exercise, it can be a welcome relief to alternate a bit.
Adding to the workout

Once you are friends with your bell, feel free to add some exercises to the routine. Some Kettlebell exercises can be technically demanding so go slow and see it as a practice more than a workout. It will help. No need in bruising your wrists (Do a few Cleans or Snatches the wrong way and you will understand what I mean) and breaking your back. I would suggest starting by adding the Clean and then the Shoulder Press. You will need the Clean to get to the starting position of the shoulder press, but the Clean is a good exercise in itself as well. See the exercises below and then check the training guidelines further down.

The Clean

The clean is in itself a good exercise. It is also the best way to get the bell up to your shoulder to then perform any form of press.

Stand up straight, then swing the bell back between your legs. Note, that the hand has been turned so your right palm (if you use your right hand of course) face your right leg. You can bend your knees a little while catching the bell. As you extend your hips, also rotate your hand so that your palm in the end will face your left. This makes the bell rotate around and land safely on your wrist. If you do this right, there should be absolutely no pain.
Make sure you stand straight and that your body is tight when you are finished. Tighten the glutes hard to protect your back.

Note that in all Kettlebell exercises where the bell is hanging outside your arm it will try to bend your wrist (as opposed to a dumbbell that you can balance in your hand). **DON'T LET IT!** **Always keep your wrist straight and strong.**
**The Shoulder Press**

The Shoulder press may look like a simple shoulder exercise but fact is that, like the squat, it will challenge your entire upper body.

Clean the bell. Make sure that your body stays tight once the bell has landed on your shoulder.

Here comes the important part. When you push something over head it is easy to cheat by arching your back. If you feel like cheating is your problem, but this also is THE reason for getting hurt. To avoid this, tense your glutes (that means you butt) as hard as you can. With your glutes tight it is physically impossible to arch your back.

Press the bell in a half circle, not straight up. Stay tight my friend.

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**Workout 2, Swing, Clean and Press**

Once you have an idea about how to Clean and Press the bell, you can integrate them on your workout. **This is all you will ever have to do to stay or become fit.** You can include some of the other exercises for further challenges or just to break the routine, but it is not necessary.

You can do the C&P and the Swing on separate days. This would guarantee that you are perfectly fresh when starting with both.

You can also do it all at once, I prefer that for time reasons. In that case there is one really important rule. **Always press before doing high rep dynamic exercise.** High rep dynamics will tire you out to the point when pressing a milk carton will be a challenge….and pressing a milk carton will not make you strong. Period. Press heavy first while you are fresh, then you can Swing until you fall over.
Try a ladder, an excellent way of gaining in strength:

Clean the bell once, do one press and put the bell back down. Repeat with your other arm. Clean the bell again, do two presses and put the bell down. Repeat with other arm.

Do this until you have reached five repetitions. Once you reached five you are done with one ladder. Star with one again. Aim to do five ladders once you got the hang of it.

These exercises are too easy
I doubt it, but good for you. Time to get a heavier bell.

Alternatives to getting a heavier bell can be to press slower, pause in the middle and also try the upside down press. For more extremely demanding presses. Check out this site:

http://www.dragondoor.com/?apid=garfield

The Swing never really gets too easy. Then you are not doing enough of them. But if you really feel that tough. Go for the Snatch instead.

More exercises
As I said before, you don’t have to do any more than the Swing to become fit. The Clean and press will add strength to your Shoulders and core. After that, it really is very much optional to add any further exercises.

Below I have added a few more if you feel like it. Once you feel tough, you can get acquainted with the Snatch. If you are interested in further exercises, have a look on the internet or check out some of my suggestions in the last section “Links and suggested reading”.

The Snatch
So you are now a tough guy and think the Swing is too easy? I just argued that it can never get too easy...but ok, it may also get a little boring so fair enough. Let’s do the Snatch instead. The Snatch is the king of Kettlebell exercises. It is however very difficult to show using pictures, so I would recommend to visit Youtube for videos.

Start from a straight stance. With the bell in one hand, let it swing back between your legs and then explode your hips forward, just like a one handed Swing.
Once the Kettlebell reaches your shoulder, give it a pull to get it moving slightly towards you.

Once the bell is moving towards you and it is over your head, sneak your hand in under it. This is not that easy and will require some training. As said before, but I cannot mention it enough, make sure you don’t just flip the bell over your hand and let it crash land on your wrist. That will hurt, maybe not the first time, but eventually.
Stand up straight, Kettlebell on a straight arm and your glutes tight (protect the back remember)

Like with the swing, drop the Kettlebell down again without trying to break it. Once it is between your legs, break it and explode again.

To see how tough you are now you can use the RKC* test as a reference. You need to be able to do 100 Snatches in 5 minutes with a 24KG (53 lbs) Kettlebell. That is no joke. I can't do it...yet. Can you?

*RKC, Russian Kettlebell Challenge. Check out Pavel Tsatsouline in the section “Links and Suggested reading”.

The Chest Press
For those of you who want to train your chest a bit extra. Here is the chest press. You can do it on the floor and it is no problem to do it for one arm at the time.

Lay down on the floor. If you do this with one arm at the time, you need to spread your legs and hold out your other arm to not roll over. Help with your opposite hand to lift the weight off the floor.
Now, tense up your body and press the bell.

Laying slightly on the side will allow you to lower the weight further before your elbow hits the ground.
Training philosophy

Like I said, when you ask ten personal trainers about a program, they will give you ten different answers. I will give you my suggestions on training. They work very well for me. If you want a second opinion (or third or fourth), check the section “Links and suggested reading”. It contains a lot of useful information.

If you are an office rat like me who on top of that have a baby and feel that the time constraints are making it hard to do everything you want to. Stay with The Snatch (or the Swing if the Snatch is too hard) and the Shoulder Press. These two exercises alone will make you strong, increase your endurance and reduce your body fat (again, that depends on what you eat). The Clean is the best way to get the Kettlebell to your shoulder in order to Shoulder press it.

Continue to do the swing about three times a week for about two weeks to get used to handle the Kettlebell. Do as much or as little work as you want. Try going for one minute non-stop, rest and then do it again. Try three sets. Once you get the hang of it, try 3setsx 2-3min or even try 3sets x all out once in a while. Experiment, just keep in mind that a gentle increase in workout volume may be better long term than a sudden one. Try using a dice to see how many minutes you need to suffer...do you feel lucky, punk?

How do I know which Kettlebell to get?

Most important, as I said before, beware of lifting a dumbbell for comparison. A Kettlebell is much harder to lift due to its asymmetric form and thick handle. Based on my own experience I put together the table below. Figure out who you are in the left column, and see the weight to your right. Be honest about your level, any type of weightlifting with too much weight causes you nothing but harm. Also, try it out in the store and ask the staff there. They will be, or should be, able to give you advice.

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<th>Starting weight</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Unfit male</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fit male</td>
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<td>Strong male used to heavy weight lifting</td>
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The number 1 site for Kettlebells and related information

http://www.dragondoor.com/shop-by-department/kettlebells/?apid=garfield&abid=cf5c00
A short word on nutrition

Is your goal to be a professional athlete and become the world champion, or is your goal to look like Brad Pitt in Fight Club, having body fat percentage around 4-5%? If the answer is yes to any of these two questions, get on a dietary program that fits these goals. If the answer is no, and perhaps your goal is to be a fit guy even if you work in an office and have three kids, there really is no immediate need to weigh your noodles. What you need, however, is a general idea about what you can eat a lot of and what you should try to not eat a lot of. Simple as that.

I use a diet that really is no diet. If I would have to name it something I guess it would be the Common Sense Method (patented by me). This means that you eat basically everything. I eat almost everything, with the exception of artichokes that I hate. Horrible stuff. My diet includes Pizza, beer, fries, coke and candy. I just try to keep the amounts reasonable. This is really not very hard once you have a fair understanding nutrition. If you have this, stop eating crap and join my non-diet "program". If you have no idea what to eat and think that Subway sandwiches and South Beach diet bars is your only salvation. Buy a book and learn. Maybe get a computer program and use it for a few weeks to learn about what the different foods contain.

If you don't agree with me that it is this easy to keep a good diet and you want help. Check out diet.com

Links and suggested reading
If you are interested in learning more about Kettlebell training, other strength training or nutrition. Have a look at the links I have listed in this section.

Kettlebell training

DRAGON DOOR

http://www.dragondoor.com/?apid=garfield

The forum of Pavel Tsatsouline. Here you can find Kettlebells for sale as well as his books and DVDs on the topic. Pavel also have workshops across the US that you can attend for more training and RKC certification.

MIKE MAHLER

www.mikemahler.com

Mike Mahler is a strength coach and very experienced with Kettlebells. He offers free information on different techniques and exercises.

Steve Cotter

General training

STRONG LIFTS

www.stronglifts.com

Excellent forum for people interested in heavy lifting and packing on muscle, run by a Belgian trainer named Mehdi. Does require access to some lifting equipment (barbell, heavy weights, power rack etc)

Nutrition

DIET


Excellent page for nutritional information. It holds info on different diets as well. You can benefit from the general information to get an idea about things but also find clear programs depending on your goals.

Others

www.henrikekstrom.com  My homepage. It does not contain much but a short explanation of myself and my contact details.