

6-Week Kettlebell Training

A MINIMALIST PROGRAM FOR ULTIMATE PERFORMANCE



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Pick Up a Kettlebell, Change Your Life



The origin of the kettlebell as we know it today is a bit vague, but it appears to have been brought into the fitness world in the 1800s by a Russian physician named Vladislav Kraevsky. He is thought to be the catalyst for the involvement of kettlebells in the weightlifting world.

Before that, Shaolin Monks in China used stone padlocks in similar ways to kettlebells and called this training Shi-Suo Gong (The Art of Stone Padlock), which preluded kettlebells by thousands of years.

Going back even more, weight implements that looked similar to kettlebells were used in 5th century Greece. They were called the “halter” and many of the movements of this swingable movement seem to have been analogous with today’s kettlebell.

In more current times, kettlebell training saw a big boom in the United States in the 1990s as combat athletes and functional training enthusiasts began encompassing this training into their strength and conditioning programs. From there, kettlebells have continued to rise in popularity and are a staple in most gyms and fitness studios.

Benefits of Kettlebell Training

Kettlebells are like the “Swiss Army Knife of training” because they do many things well. Unlike dumbbells, the center of mass of a kettlebell is extended beyond the hand. This allows explosive swinging movements. Kettlebells can be pressed, swung, thrown, juggled, held, and more.

The kettlebell consists of a bell, handle, and horns. The bell is the round-shaped weight, the handle connects to the kettlebell via a downward slope at each end, called the horns. Typically, the kettlebell is gripped by the handle, but with exercises like goblet squats, it is gripped by the horns.

Let’s look at the benefits of a properly designed kettlebell training program.

ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Even during a quarantine when you can’t go to the gym, such as with the COVID-19 pandemic, you can perform an effective, full-body kettlebell routine with as little as one kettlebell. You can even get some Vitamin D by training outside with a kettlebell at the park or beach.

Take ownership and be ready for a workout anywhere, anytime! Make fitness your reality with the [ISSA Personal Trainer Certification!](#)

GRIP STRENGTH

This goes far beyond potentially being the weak link in the chain that lifts heavy weight or grabs an opponent in sport. [Grip strength](#) is an important biomarker of health. In middle-aged and elderly people, grip strength predicts mortality risk from all causes and does an even better job than blood pressure. In disabled, elderly women, grip strength predicts all-cause mortality and holds up when controlling for disease status, inflammatory load, depression, nutritional status, and inactivity.

The kettlebell handle, in concert with the displaced load it forces on your fingers, hands, and forearms, is much more taxing on grip strength than training with barbells or dumbbells. Kettlebell training is one of the most effective grip training modalities AND offers a host of other benefits.

ENHANCES ATHLETICISM

Pumping out ample volume on the pec deck might pump up some beach muscles, but the reality is, as time takes its toll, movement capacity and athleticism decrease. Kettlebell training counteracts this because of the continually shifting center of gravity, similarly to what an athlete experiences in sport. Training with kettlebells teaches your body to produce force and stabilize itself in the midst of chaotic movement. A great athlete's body does not work in isolation, their body works as a unified system. Kettlebells teach the system to perform.

POWERFUL HIP EXTENSION

Hip extension is one of the most important movement patterns in sports: jumping, sprinting, or striking. One of the most basic kettlebell exercises is the swing, which teaches the hip extensors to produce high amounts of force fast. Knowing how to maximize hip force is essential in any sport that requires explosive power, but hip strength also serves to ensure stability and prevent injuries.

MUSCLE HYPERTROPHY

Kettlebells are not superior to heavy, high-volume barbell training for catalyzing muscle hypertrophy. But, assuming nutrition is dialed in, untrained people will quickly add muscle mass with kettlebell training, and more advanced trainees, who have not trained with kettlebells, pack on muscle because this is a new stimulus. Because kettlebell workouts are relatively quick, they trigger a large spike in testosterone levels, further formulating the case kettlebell training is the fountain of youth.

POSTERIOR CHAIN DEVELOPMENT/POSTURE IMPROVEMENT

Bodybuilders notoriously have underdeveloped hamstrings and are classically quad dominant. Spin-offs of bodybuilding methodology have dominated the fitness industry since its inception. Many basic kettlebell exercises target the entire backside of the body making kettlebells king for the [posterior chain](#). For example, kettlebell swings are an explosive hinging movement pattern that builds powerful hamstrings, glutes, lower back, middle back, and traps. Kettlebell training will develop the major muscles of your core, hips, traps, shoulders, forearms, and even neck to an extent—all these muscles are paramount in having great posture and a strong posterior chain.

FAT LOSS

Generally, kettlebell training is high intensity, so the fat-burning effect lingers on far past the calories burned in the training session. The burn after effect or excess post-exercise oxygen consumption (EPOC), from a fat-burning perspective, means much of the fat loss magic happens up to 24 hours after the kettlebell training session has ended.

FUNCTIONAL TRAINING

Unlike machines that force you into a predetermined groove of exercise execution, kettlebells force you to determine an exercise's groove. Like sport, you set the tone and in turn, this builds strong stabilizer muscles in all ranges of motion, increases core power and balance, making you more effective in a self-preservation

situation pumping gas at 3 AM or in the company's annual Labor Day flag football tournament.

CARDIO ALTERNATIVE

Many of you and/or your clients hate traditional forms of cardio! Besides preference, excessive running can wreak havoc on the joints. Not to mention, according to [research](#), some men's testosterone levels decrease with large volumes of long-distance running, cycling, and other forms of long, slow cardio.

On the other hand, [kettlebell intervals](#) do the opposite, helping you boost testosterone levels and more effectively burn fat, build muscle, boost metabolic rate, improve muscular strength and endurance, prevent joint overuse, and improve cardiovascular health. Unless your goal is specifically a long-distance race, kettlebell training trumps long-distance running all day and twice on Sunday.

RISK TO BENEFIT

NFL teams do not tackle each other to the ground in practice in-season because of injury risk. Like this example, everything in exercise exists on a spectrum: what are the potential risks, and what are the potential benefits? Kettlebell training, from an overuse standpoint, is much safer than long-distance running and, from an acute injury standpoint, is safer than traditional strength lifts like heavy squats and deadlifts. Kettlebells will improve flexibility, mobility, stabilizer muscle strength, joint integrity, and tendon elasticity. All making you more injury resistant!

If athletics is your passion, stop waiting around! Become an elite strength and conditioning coach with an [ISSA Strength and Conditioning](#) certification today!

SIMPLICITY

The number one ingredient to an effective strength and conditioning program is adherence. The bells and whistles initially seem entertaining but quickly that novelty stimulus dispels. The basics work. Basic is proven and is sustainable. And remember, the word basic means fundamental, not elementary. Kettlebells are basic and much of their beauty lies in their simplicity. If you were exiled to Siberia and only allowed one piece of training equipment, the kettlebell would be the best choice because it develops a multitude of qualities well.

REDUCES TRAINING TIME

People are busier than ever and it's impossible to make more time! Kettlebells give you a tool to execute a time-efficient workout without sparing quality. This allows for more rest and recovery and doing the things you love outside of exercise.

ACTIVE RECOVERY

Light kettlebell training, not taken to any sort of strength or endurance extreme, is an excellent way to speed up [recovery](#) and get some blood flowing.

ENHANCES WORK CAPACITY

Military.com defines work capacity as "the ability to keep moving (and lifting/carrying objects) at a steady pace for a long period of time." Work capacity is important for life and any sporting endeavor. Kettlebells are arguably the most effective training tool to build work capacity.

Key Kettlebell Exercises



Bruce Lee said, “I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once, but I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.” Keeping aligned with this spirit, this program focuses on three basic kettlebell exercises and doing them well! Also included are two basic bodybuilding exercises performed with a kettlebell.

For this full-body program, you need you and a kettlebell—that’s it!

Exercise #1 (Kettlebell Swing)

This is the fundamental kettlebell exercise. Focus on technique—the swing is not a squat, it is a hinge at the hips.

Start with your feet approximately shoulder-width apart, with your toes straight ahead or turned slightly out. The kettlebell should be 12-18 inches in front of you. Bend at the waist and load the hips back as you do your best to keep your shins perpendicular to the floor, this brings your torso into a more horizontal position. From a neutral back, braced position, arms extended grab the kettlebell with your feet flat.

From here, forcefully pull your shoulder blades down and back, and let the kettlebell move back toward your hips. Your knees should be slightly bent but the most important thing is to keep the weight back and load the hamstrings. With the arms remaining in extension throughout the movement and serving as “hooks,” forcefully extend your hips as you drive the kettlebell upwards. The focus should be on the glutes producing hip extension. Only swing the bell to the where you have straightened your legs and squeezed your glutes. Trying to go above your shoulders poses risks to your shoulders not to mention whacking yourself in the head. All that matters is leg and hip extension, not height. Repeat for the prescribed number of reps.

Additional Tips: Remember, this movement is a hinge, not a squat; “squatty” swings are a common mistake with kettlebell swings. The arms are hooks that hold the weight; drive the bell with your hips, do not attempt to lift the weight with your arms. Always stay in control of the kettlebell.

Exercise #2 (Goblet Squat)

With your feet turned out 10-15 degrees in a hip- to shoulder-width stance, hold the kettlebell by the horns at chest level. Your elbows should be tucked in tight so they are locked into a position perpendicular to the floor. From here, brace your core and get ready to squat. From this position “sit down” by bending at the knees and hips while keeping your feet flat on the floor, torso vertical and core braced. Go down as deep as you can go without compromising position, this will vary from person to person based on several individual factors. From the bottom position, push evenly through the floor through your full foot and stand up. Repeat for the prescribed number of reps.

You should feel this movement in your quadriceps, glutes, upper back, and core.

Additional Tips: Do not have clients drop their hips all the way down if positioning is compromised; depth will be different for everyone. Cue clients to “screw your feet into the ground.” This will keep the knees from tracking in and activate the glutes and hamstrings.

Exercise #3 (Kettlebell Clean and Press)

Start with your feet approximately shoulder-width apart and a kettlebell in front of you. With a slight knee bend, hinge at your hips so you can reach down and grab the handle with one hand. Grip the handle of the kettlebell. You can extend the arm of the non-working side out as a counterbalance. From here, swing the kettlebell back between your legs. Now use the momentum you have created by driving the hips forward and up, straightening your back, and keeping the bell close to your body. Once the kettlebell is above your waist, pull it back and move your hand under it so the kettlebell is resting against the back of your wrist. This is the rack position (make sure you are not wearing a watch). In the rack position, the kettlebell will be just below shoulder height, your elbows should be tucked into your chest. Now from here press the kettlebell above your head until your arms are in extension. Lower the kettlebell to the rack position and reverse the clean movement. Repeat for the prescribed number of reps.

Along with targeting the glutes, hamstrings, upper back, and core during the pressing movement, the shoulders, chest, and triceps are heavily loaded.

Additional Tips: The press is not an isolation exercise; you need full-body tension. Do this by driving your feet into the floor, squeezing your glutes, standing tall, and squeezing the kettlebell tight.

Learn even more about glute activation and [become the go-to glute expert with ISSA's Certified Glute Specialist course](#). Increase your knowledge, improve your training, and boost your revenue!

Exercise #4 (Kettlebell Standing French Press)

In a standing position, with your feet shoulder-width apart, lift the kettlebell above your head gripping it by the horns. Keep your elbow tucked in by your ears. Lower the kettlebell behind your head at a controlled pace, by bending at the elbows and squeezing your triceps. Lower until you reach a 90-degree bend in the elbow or slightly further (if want to feel a mild stretch). From here, using your triceps, extend the weight back to the starting position. Repeat the prescribed number of reps.

This is considered a triceps isolation exercise, but your core will be engaged because you are having to stabilize your body while standing and executing the exercise.

Additional Tips: Focus on “muscle intention” or the conscious and intentional contraction of triceps, do not focus on just moving the weight from point A to point B.

Exercise #5 (Towel Kettlebell Curls)

Wrap a towel around (under) a kettlebell's handle, then grab the ends of the towel with a neutral grip (like a hammer curl). From a standing position, keep your upper arms as stationary as possible, curl the weight up until your forearms are parallel with the floor. Pause in this position for 1 second. Lower to the starting position where your arms are nearly straight. Repeat for the prescribed number of reps.

Besides your core stabilizing your body in the standing position, this exercise challenges your biceps, brachialis

(key for maximizing arm development), and your grip strength.

Additional Tips: Focus on “muscle intention” or the conscious and intentional contraction of biceps; do not focus on just moving the weight from point A to point B.

With all these movements, it is important to maintain a neutral spine. A neutral spine leads to a lower rate of injuries (actually helps build a back that is more injury resistant), avoids unwarranted compensations, conserves energy, improved core activation, and increases your capacity to handle compressive forces.

A neutral spine is when the three curves of the spine—lumbar (lower), thoracic (middle), and cervical (neck)—are in proper alignment. This position is the strongest for the spine when you are standing and even sitting. This is not a “flat spine,” as the spine has natural curves that need to be sustained under load.

Compromising this position with excessive flexion or extension compromises strength and greatly exacerbates your chance of injury. Lifting kettlebells in those excessive positions are bad for your back. But, properly executing the exercises in ISSA’s kettlebell program will help decrease your chance of injury while simultaneously increasing lower back and posterior chain strength.

Starting Weights/Progressions

There is no proven exact science on what weight is optimal to start your kettlebell journey. Consider the following suggestions and adjust accordingly to your or your client’s specific needs and abilities.

- Women start with either a 13- or 18-pound kettlebell
- Men start with either a 26- or 35-pound kettlebell

Remember, while this may sound easy, with kettlebells, you will be hitting muscles you have never felt before or, minimally, with a stimulus they are unaccustomed to.

Choosing a Kettlebell

As kettlebells increase in popularity, so too do the options available for purchase. Consider choosing a kettlebell that will fit the following specifications:

- A smooth, chip-resistant coating, so it will feel good for high repetition sets that will not irritate your hands but still has enough texture so you can effectively use chalk. High-quality kettlebells are built with a smooth, curved handle and should be able to be gripped, on the handle or horns without issue.
- While there are no snatches in this program, you may eventually evolve to that so it is important to have the appropriate clearance from the handles to the bells to allow for proper execution, and the handle needs to be smooth so you don’t tear your hands up.
- Kettlebells are not cheap, but they should last you a lifetime. Make sure your kettlebells offer some sort of guarantee, preferably a lifetime one.
- As you learn more or if you can try a kettlebell before purchasing, then factor in your preferences of bell diameter, grip width, and handle thickness.

ISSA's 6-Week Kettlebell Program



This is a three-day week program with optional active recovery days. The program follows an undulated periodization model with the objective being a constant change in stimuli throughout the training week over the six-week training cycle. The program manipulates training variables often by frequently adjusting loading parameters, reps, and training volume.

In this training, on the three training days, one will focus on strength, one day on power, and one day on conditioning.

This method was popularized by the legendary strength coach, the late Charles Poliquin. Besides the physiological benefits, this program is highly effective for preventing boredom and burnout and is a blessing for people that desire to be proficient in a multitude of qualities concurrently.

The Program

In this program, each day has a focused training factor.

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7
WEEK 1	Strength	Optional active recovery	Conditioning	Optional active recovery	Power	Optional active recovery	Off
WEEK 2	Strength	Optional active recovery	Conditioning	Optional active recovery	Power	Optional active recovery	Off
WEEK 3	Strength	Optional active recovery	Conditioning	Optional active recovery	Power	Optional active recovery	Off
WEEK 4	Strength	Optional active recovery	Conditioning	Optional active recovery	Power	Optional active recovery	Off
WEEK 5	Strength	Optional active recovery	Conditioning	Optional active recovery	Power	Optional active recovery	Off
WEEK 6	Strength	Optional active recovery	Conditioning	Optional active recovery	Power	Optional active recovery	Off

Warm-up

Start your warm-up by doing any activity that elevates your body temperature for five to eight minutes. This can include but is not limited to: jogging, brisk walking, or any piece of cardio equipment at the gym.

After this, move directly into dynamic stretching.

Dynamic stretching incorporates active (meaning you actively stretch without outside assistance) range of motion (ROM). Dynamic stretches generally look somewhat like sport-specific or training-specific motions. Unlike static stretching, dynamic stretches are not held at the end of the range of motion.

A plethora of patterns can be utilized, but it's important to keep in mind that movements similar to those you will be training will provide you with the greatest benefit. Be careful to not exceed the currently established range of motion for the joint(s) being stretched.

There are two important details to remember to maximize benefit and minimize risk. First, establish an even, controlled rhythm, with all movements initially well within the current range of motion. Then, gradually increase the amplitude of the movement until you are at the desired level of tension at the endpoint of the movement.

Remember, these are specialized movements, and care must be taken with their use. Make it a habit to precede dynamic stretching with a general warm-up of five to eight minutes. And never stretch a cold muscle.

The following is an example of a warm-up for a kettlebell session.

- 5 to 8 moderate intensity on treadmill
- Dynamic stretch
 - Walk on toes—2 sets of 15 yards
 - Walk on heels—2 sets of 15 yards
 - Arm swings—2 sets of 10 clockwise and counterclockwise
 - Arm hugs—2 sets of 10 reps
 - Straight leg kicks—3 sets of 15 yards
 - Leg swings—2 sets of 15 reps
 - High knees—3 sets of 15 yards
 - Walking lunges—3 sets of 15 yards
 - Lateral lunges—2 sets of 10 reps (back and forth, do not hold end position)
 - Wrist circles—3 sets, 15 each way
 - Hula hip swings—2 sets of 10 clockwise and counterclockwise
 - Elbow circles—3 sets, 15 each way
 - Shoulder circles—3 sets, 15 each way

Upon completing this warm-up, start warming up for the first kettlebell movement of the day with one to two sets of light weight with the kettlebell exercise you will be executing. If you only have one kettlebell, execute a couple of sets of a light, compound movement like a squat, deadlift, or clean. Full body, bodyweight exercises are also an excellent choice.

Please do not skimp on the warm-up!

Some of the benefits of a proper warm-up:

- IMPROVED PERFORMANCE!
- Increased muscle contraction and relaxation speed
- More “economical”/efficient movement patterns
- Reduced muscle stiffness
- Improved oxygen utilization
- Improved motor unit recruitment for all-out activity (i.e., more coordinated movements with increased intensity)
- Increased blood flow
- Heart rate is brought to the proper level for beginning exercise
- Increased mental focus for the task at hand

Strength (Day 1)

EXERCISE	WEIGHT OR INTENSITY	SETS	REPS	REST INTERVAL
Kettlebell Clean and Press	Heavy as possible with perfect technique	3	6	2-3 minutes
Goblet Squat	Heavy as possible with perfect technique	3	6	2-3 minutes
Kettlebell Swing	Heavy as possible with perfect technique	3	6	2-3 minutes
Push-ups	See notes below	3	6	2-3 minutes
Pull-ups	See notes below	3	6	2-3 minutes

Use beginner progressions if push-ups or pull-ups are too difficult, or advanced progressions if too easy.

Conditioning (Day 3)

EXERCISE	WEIGHT OR INTENSITY	SETS	REPS	REST INTERVAL
Kettlebell Clean and Press	20 repetition max	8	8	30 seconds
Goblet Squat	20 repetition max	8	8	30 seconds
Burpees	Bodyweight	Max	6-10	See description
Kettlebell Standing French Press	Heavy as possible with perfect technique	4	12-15	60-90 seconds
Towel Kettlebell Curls	Heavy as possible with perfect technique	4	12-15	N/A

For burpees, do anywhere from 6-10; the higher the level of conditioning, the more you should do. After each set, rest until your heart rate returns to 115-125 then do the next set. Continue this for 10 minutes. The objective is maximum sets in 10 minutes within these specified parameters.

Execute the standing French press and towel curls in a muscle intention style. These are performed in a superset style—do the curls immediately after the French Press, then rest 60-90 seconds. Do this four times.

Power (Day 5)

EXERCISE	WEIGHT OR INTENSITY	SETS	REPS	REST INTERVAL
Kettlebell Clean and Press	Moderate	3	3	1-2 minutes
Kettlebell Swing	Moderate	3	6	1-2 minutes
Goblet Squats	Moderate	3	3	1-2 minutes
Vertical Jumps	Bodyweight	1	12	30 seconds
Plyometric Push-ups	Bodyweight	3	3	1-2 minutes

Each movement should be executed as fast as possible with great technique. If you cannot move the kettlebell fast, lower the weight!

If any injuries or strength issues prevent you from the jumps or plyo push-ups, omit them from the program.

Active Recovery (Days 2, 4, 6)

EXERCISE	WEIGHT OR INTENSITY	SETS	REPS	REST INTERVAL
Any	Active Recovery	20-40 minutes	1	N/A

Anything that keeps your heart rate between 110 and 145 is permissible.

Active recovery modalities: brisk walking, rucking, jump rope, elliptical, swimming, sled drags, bodyweight training, light agility work, low-intensity tempo runs, or very light lifting technique work.

All active recovery days are 100 percent optional; you can do one, two, three, or none at all! If the goal is fat loss, try performing at least two active recovery days a week.

Remember the following points:

- Add 5-10 percent to the weight you use, if possible, once you comfortably complete the exercises with great technique (if unsure, do not progress).
- For the first time you do this protocol, stay with the exercises, sets, reps for the entire six weeks. As you advance, you can switch exercises more frequently on subsequent runs of this program.
- If you have high blood pressure, heart issues, poor conditioning, or other health concerns, consult your physician before beginning this program.
- If you require additional rest, lower the weight and hit the prescribed sets and reps.
- When all reps in the sequences are achieved, increase the resistance.
- Execute isolation exercises by focusing specifically on the muscle you are targeting and feeling, not just moving the weight. This is referred to as muscle intention with compound movements; focus on the movement pattern.
- Rest for 48 to 72 hours between training days. Active recovery days are not considered training days.

Make the Most of Your Training

Many believe that kettlebells are effective only for building strength endurance. Not so. Multiple studies prove that kettlebells can build explosive power and strength. In fact, kettlebells are a great addition to almost any training program.

As you start to add it to your clients' workout plans, be sure you focus on weight, proper form, and control throughout the movement. Kettlebells are a versatile training tool and incredibly effective if done correctly.

You are now empowered with the knowledge to get great results with kettlebell training! We look forward to seeing your results; if you post them on social media, make sure to tag ISSA!

Motivated and ready to learn more? Take your fitness education up a notch with the [ISSA's Elite Trainer Certification](#).

As an Elite Trainer you get:

- Personal Trainer Certification - Self-Guided Study Program
- Nutritionist Specialization
- Any advanced specialization

Get the expertise you need to train more effectively and set yourself apart from the crowd.