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Weight-training tool builds cardio strength too

Kettlebells

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To have a fighting chance against a younger, stronger opponent, actor Sylvester Stallone, as "Rocky Balboa" in the new movie, turns to a piece of old-time Russian equipment, the kettlebell. It's among an arsenal of training tools that includes chains and barrels. Rocky's not alone, as kettlebell training has caught on with a new generation that wants an exercise regimen that builds strength and cardiovascular fitness while burning calories.

Denver personal trainer Josh Hillis is among those employing the equipment to help his clients get in shape, and he's not dealing only with macho guys.

Hillis uses kettlebells, dumbbells and body-weight exercises as part of a high-intensity regimen to help people lose weight. His



1. Pick up the kettlebell from the floor with your feet shoulder-width apart and your hands just outside your feet. 2. Squat down, pushing the kettlebell up with your hips. 3. Stand upright, holding the kettlebell at arm's length.



1. Pick up the kettlebell from the floor with your feet shoulder-width apart and your hands just outside your feet. 2. Squat down, pushing the kettlebell up with your hips. 3. Stand upright, holding the kettlebell high above your head with both hands.

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clients tend to be women who work out and eat well but can't shed that last 7 to 10 pounds. The intensity of kettlebell training helps them break through that wall, Hillis says. Kettlebell training, combined with the right diet, can burn fat as well.

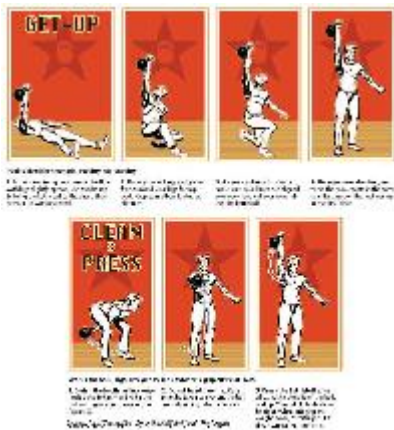
"If someone wants to cause a drastic change in the way their body looks, their workout needs a certain level of intensity, and kettlebell exercises like swings and snatches provide that intensity like nothing else," he says.

Colorado Free University has offered classes in how to use kettlebells, and trainers around the state are teaching fitness seekers to maximize their workouts with the weights.

Resembling cannonballs with a handle, kettlebells (*girya* in Russian) range from 9 pounds to more than 100 pounds. The weights were reintroduced in the United States in 1998 by former Soviet Special Forces physical training instructor Pavel Tsatsouline, who has produced books and instructional DVDs on the subject.

A lot of the value of the kettlebell is derived from fast exercise work such as snatches, swings, cleans and jerks. The shape of the kettlebell is

better suited than dumbbells for these ballistic exercises once the weight is



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increased. In pressing the kettlebell, the off-centered weight forces one to use more stabilizing muscles. There is no fixed path, as in a weight machine, to restrict reps to one plane of movement. Strengthening the stabilizing muscles potentially lessens the chance of injury. Muscles aren't isolated, but rather incorporated to handle the task, lending a real-world application that can enhance sports and recreational activities.

An average-sized man should start with a 16-kilogram kettlebell, about 35 pounds. An average-sized woman should start with one that is 18 pounds.

Kettlebells sometimes are measured in *poods*, an old Russian unit of weight. One *pood* equals 16 kilograms. The heaviest kettlebell, a 3-*pood* monster appropriately called "The Beast," weighs in at 106 pounds. Only a few can perform the Beast Challenge, a strength test that involves one pull-up, one military press and a one-legged squat using this hunk of iron.

Myriad exercises can be done with kettlebells. According to Tsatsouline, the two that give the most bang for the buck are the swing and the get-up, a pull and a press for an overall body workout. Before attempting the exercises, one should get private instruction and refer to "Enter the Kettlebell" for pre-exercise stretches and detailed descriptions that help prepare for the demands of the activity.

Glenn Hyman, a Denver chiropractor and kettlebell instructor, says kettlebells can be an effective tool for strengthening a person's core and lower back, even if they have lower-back trouble.

"The kettlebell's center of mass lines up with the body's center of gravity, minimizing strain on the back," Hyman says, adding that he recommends using kettlebells or any weights no more than three times a week.

Kettlebell lifting and competitions, known as *girevoy* sport, long have been popular in Russia. The competitor, or *girevik*, is tested on two events, the one-arm snatch and the clean and jerk, which uses two kettlebells. For each event, the athlete is given 10 minutes to perform as many lifts as possible.

In "Enter the Kettlebell," Tsatsouline writes that the U.S. Secret Service has a test of its own to measure fitness: snatches for 10 minutes. If you can snatch a 53-pound kettlebell 200 times in 10 minutes, you're in good shape. Oh, and military press half your body weight with one arm.

Until then, a regimen with kettlebells you can comfortably manage will help you shape up, if not get into boxing condition.

Works the back, legs, abs, glutes, hips, forearms and grip

1. Place feet somewhat wider than shoulder width apart, back straight, head up and eyes facing forward, sit back rather than dip down. Rest kettlebell between the feet.
2. Grip the kettlebell with two hands and move as if to hike-pass it behind you.
3. Swing kettlebell forward, snapping the hips by contracting the glutes and raise to standing position. The arms should be relaxed and

straight. The contraction of the glutes is what propels the kettlebell to chest level.

Builds shoulder strength, mobility and stability

1. From a reclining position on the floor, with legs slightly spread, use two hands to bring the kettlebell to the chest, then press it up with one hand.
2. Raise yourself up, using your free arm and your legs for support. Keep your elbow locked at all times.
3. As you continue to stand up, make sure your knees are aligned over your feet and your eyes follow the kettlebell.
4. Once you are standing, reverse the movements in the same seamless motion that got you up in the first place.

Develops backs, hips, grip and cardiovascular endurance

1. Position kettlebell between feet, which are slightly wider than shoulder width apart. With back straight, head up and eyes facing forward, sit back and grip kettlebell with one hand.
2. Swing kettlebell backward and then upward in one motion, keeping kettlebell close to the body.
3. The kettlebell flips over the hand, with the hand punching up to meet it to avoid having the weight slam into the forearm. The move finishes with the elbow locked overhead.

Works the back, legs, abs, glutes, hips, forearms, grip and shoulders

1. Swing the kettlebell up, keeping it close to the chest, with the bell resting on your forearm (see Figure2).
2. Do not bend the wrist. Care must be taken to prevent the bell from slamming into the forearm.
3. Press the kettlebell somewhat out to the side of the body and up. Your whole body should be tight. When bringing the weight down, forcefully pull it down with a crushing grip.

Safety

Flinging a large iron ball is potentially hazardous, so here are a few safety tips:

1. Check with a doctor before starting any workout program.
2. Be aware of your surroundings: You don't want to be swinging the kettlebell into your favorite porcelain-poodle collection or family member. Some movements that require switching hands on the fly are best learned outdoors on grass.
3. Wear flat shoes (no cushy soles) or go barefoot.
4. Never contest for space with a kettlebell. If the bell gets away from you, get out of the kettlebell's way. Trying to stop it from falling can lead to nasty injuries.
5. Keep moving once your heart rate is up. Kettlebell exercises can send your heart rate soaring, so engaging in active rest movements between sets, such as jogging in place, will be easier on your heart.

6. Build up your training load gradually.

Where to get kettlebells and instruction

DragonDoor.com sells kettlebells and books, DVDs, newsletters and forums to educate the future *girevik*. The best book and DVD to start with is Pavel Tsatsouline's, "Enter the Kettlebell." (Dragon Door Publications, \$34.95) It covers such basics as pre-exercise stretching for correct posture and flexibility, routines, history and safety. There's even a chapter on the manly craft of making a kettlebell.

Russian Kettlebell Certified (RKC) instructors in Colorado can be found at: dragondoor.com/cgi-bin/instructor.pl?state=CO#USA

In Denver, Glenn Hyman is a certified kettlebell instructor. Reach him at the Denver Chiropractic Center, 303-300-0424; denverback.com

Josh Hillis, RKC, teaches at 24 Hour Fitness, 4120 E, Alameda Ave. and is the author of "The Stubborn Seven Pounds: Take Your Body from Good to Rock Star;" more at joshsgaragedenver.com

Senior RKC instructor Mike Mahler has taught seminars locally and can customize individual strength and fitness programs via his website, mikemahler.com. The site also contains articles on strength training, nutrition, living a healthy lifestyle and offers instructional DVDs for sale.

Tracy Reifkind used kettlebells along with a good diet to lose 100 pounds in less than a year. Her story at giryastrength.com.

For the extreme athlete, there's always kettlebell juggling. The website girevoysport.ru/video.htm contains a video of a petite woman flinging a kettlebell around like it was a baton. There is also footage of *girevoy* sport competition.