

Chapter 1

Shaping Up with Kettlebells

In This Chapter

- ▶ Seeing how kettlebell workouts are different from other routines
 - ▶ Choosing a kettlebell and other gear
 - ▶ Knowing how to align your spine and hips
 - ▶ Breathing right, warming up, cooling down, and being careful if you overdo your workout
 - ▶ Introducing basic and advanced moves
 - ▶ Adjusting workouts for special circumstances
-

Welcome to the world of kettlebells! A kettlebell, which looks like a cannonball with a handle, is a very simple, yet effective piece of equipment that allows you to work most of your muscle groups at the same time. Because of the fast-paced, dynamic motions in kettlebell exercises, your heart rate increases with each repetition, keeping your body in the fat-burning zone throughout your workout.

One of the greatest things about using kettlebells is that you don't need to be a hard-core, experienced fitness enthusiast to start using them. However, if you want to get the results that a kettlebell offers, you do have to challenge and tax your muscles and cardiovascular strength. Kettlebells are a tough, no-nonsense workout tool that will challenge you both physically and mentally. So, if you're someone who prefers to read your paper on the treadmill, kettlebells are probably not a good choice for you. On the other hand, if you're someone who enjoys being challenged when you work out, you'll surely find success with kettlebells. As you become a more experienced kettlebeller, you'll be pushed to your limit as you swing and snatch your way to a stronger and more confident you.

In this chapter, I introduce you to some kettlebell fundamentals, including how kettlebells are different from other workouts and how to move your spine and hips properly when using them. I also describe a sampling of basic exercises, show you where to go if you're ready to advance to more challenging exercises, and note how special audiences can work out with kettlebells. Prepare to get moving!

Comparing Kettlebells to Other Workouts

Kettlebell exercise is different from traditional weight lifting and other fitness programs in many ways. For example,

- ✓ **Kettlebells combine a strength-training and cardiovascular workout into one program.** Very few workout programs accomplish such a combination, and those that do aren't accessible to or easily learned by the novice. Olympic lifting comes close to the power and strength you get from working out with kettlebells, but it lacks the versatility of kettlebells. Ever try swinging a barbell between your legs? Besides, Olympic lifts aren't nearly as easy to learn as kettlebell exercises. And I don't know about you, but I don't have any desire to squat 400 pounds on a regular basis.
- ✓ **Most kettlebell exercises utilize all your major muscle groups.** A kettlebell workout doesn't isolate muscle groups, so instead of working just one muscle group like you do with a dumbbell, kettlebells work multiple muscle groups with each exercise. The result is a workout that's quicker, more efficient, and more effective than a traditional workout routine.

Check out Chapter 2 to find out more about the benefits of working out with kettlebells and how to use them safely.

Selecting Your Kettlebell and Gathering Other Gear

One very appealing aspect of kettlebell workouts is that you don't need much equipment to do them. One kettlebell is all you need to start with, and, if you choose the correct size at the beginning, you won't have to go and buy another one for a while. Plus, even when you are ready to move up in kettlebell weight, you'll still have uses for your lighter kettlebell (such as during warm-up exercises that involve the kettlebell; see Chapter 5). Typically, experienced kettlebellers (or those who just want to try a few of the two-kettlebell workouts like the ones I provide in this book) have two or three kettlebells, but even so, relative to some other fitness programs, kettlebells are an inexpensive fitness tool. Refer to Chapter 3 for a complete discussion on how to pick the right size kettlebell and where to get one.



The only other gear besides your kettlebell that you really need to get started is a stopwatch, a yoga mat (or some sort of padded flooring like carpet), and this book. Any other equipment listed throughout the book is optional, and I give you plenty of alternatives for using items you probably already have in your house (like a chair) so you can get started right away. And it's okay if you

haven't purchased your kettlebell just yet, because, with most of the foundational exercises, I help you practice without your kettlebell before I show you how to do the exercise with your kettlebell.

Getting a Grip on Proper Spine and Hip Alignment

When it comes to using kettlebells the right way, you need to take some time to figure out how to position your spine and move from your hips to maximize the benefit you get from your workout and minimize the chance of injury. The majority of people I've trained over the years don't know how to position their spine and hips properly when they take their first kettlebell class because most traditional exercises don't incorporate these essential principles. Here's one big example: People who perform squat exercises in the gym typically use a machine to assist them, and, when they squat, their range of motion is limited.

However, when you squat down to the floor to pick up a box or some other object (like a kettlebell), not only do you need a greater range of motion than a typical squat requires of your body, but you also need to know how to initiate the movement from your hips (so you don't hurt your back), how to brace your abdominals (so you stabilize your core for strength and control throughout the movement), and how to press through your heels to activate your glutes and hamstrings (see Chapter 4 for more details). Kettlebells help you master these basic techniques and show you that moving in this way is actually very natural.



I can't emphasize enough how the essential techniques in Chapter 4 will benefit your body and get you moving for success. There, you find the details on achieving *neutral spine* (the natural S curve in your back) and snapping your hips the right way so you're properly aligned throughout all your kettlebell workouts.

Breathing Correctly, Warming Up, Cooling Down, and Easing Up

Mastering the right breathing technique is an essential part of using kettlebells properly. But, don't worry — it isn't as technical as it sounds. In fact, breathing the right way for kettlebells comes quite naturally, and after you know how to use the right breathing pattern during your exercises, your breathing in everyday life will feel much more powerful and less shallow.

The technique I recommend is called *diaphragmatic breathing*, and it's simply a way to tighten your *virtual belt* — which is also known as abdominal bracing. Using this breathing technique allows you to protect yourself from the weight and force of your kettlebell before you even execute an exercise by stabilizing your core with breath control.

In addition, like any fitness program, warming up, cooling down, and making sure you haven't overdone it are important parts of being successful with your routine.

- ✔ You can use dynamic stretches and Z-Health options during your warm-up; you can also incorporate your kettlebell into your warm-up.
- ✔ To cool down, you can do some quick 'n' easy stretches as well as use a band and a foam roller.
- ✔ If you find yourself sore after a workout, you can try some simple techniques to ease the soreness; if you've really gone overboard, you need to modify your program for success.

Make sure to read through Chapter 5 to figure out how to breathe, warm up, and cool down properly and how to relieve muscle soreness. (As a bonus in that chapter, I also discuss some options for making your workout's rest periods a little more active.)

Starting with Basic Exercises

To begin your kettlebell practice, you need to learn a few basic foundational exercises. If you take the time to hone these basic movements, you'll find it much easier to learn more intermediate and advanced exercises, not to mention you'll be less likely to develop bad habits in form and technique. Starting with the basic exercises I cover in Chapters 6 through 8 (and introduce in the following sections) is necessary for you to get above-average results from your kettlebell workout — and speaking of workouts, I provide a few full-length routines built from these basics in Chapter 9.

The swing

The swing is the first foundational exercise I walk you through in this book, and it has many variations. However, you need to master only three basic variations to have a well-rounded kettlebell routine:

- ✔ **Two-arm swing:** The most basic swing exercise, this variation requires you to have two hands on the kettlebell when moving it.
- ✔ **One-arm swing:** As you probably guessed, this variation involves moving the kettlebell with only one hand on it.
- ✔ **Alternating swing:** For this slightly more advanced variation, you have to switch your hand positioning while the kettlebell is “live” or in the air.

None of these variations is particularly difficult to execute; in fact, the basic movement in the swing is quite natural. Its benefits include trimming and strengthening your core and rear, building cardiovascular endurance, and burning lots of fat. Refer to Chapter 6 for complete details on performing swings.

The Turkish get-up

Although the Turkish get-up is considered a basic exercise, it’s one of the most difficult exercises to master. The good news is that you can break down the Turkish get-up into manageable steps, so you can master one part of the movement at a time and then put them together as you go. Before you know it, you’ll be performing the complete exercise flawlessly.

Even though doing this exercise well takes some practice, like the swing, it’s an important foundational exercise to master. The Turkish get-up shows you how to keep your shoulders sunk into their sockets, which is an essential principle in all kettlebell exercises. The Turkish get-up also has many other benefits — developing shoulder and core stability and increasing shoulder mobility, just to name a couple. Chapter 7 offers a comprehensive lesson on how to master the Turkish get-up and its variations.

The front squat, the clean, and the military press

The front squat, the clean, and the military press round out the foundational exercises. After you master the swing, doing the squat, the clean, and the press is somewhat simpler because you already know how to move the kettlebell with your hips, maintain proper spine alignment, and follow other important principles that carry over to these exercises. The squat, the clean, and the press all strengthen your core, help slim your waist and glutes, increase your mobility and flexibility, and build cardiovascular and muscular endurance. See Chapter 8 for the fundamentals of these three moves.

Moving to Advanced Exercises

To make progress with your kettlebell workout, you have to continue to challenge your body. Sometimes my workouts consist of only the five basic exercises that I describe in the preceding section, but most workouts have at least one or two intermediate-to-advanced exercises in them, too. Here's where to go to get more info:

- ✓ Check out Chapter 10 to find exercises that take your training beyond the basics with moves specifically meant to improve your strength, flexibility, and mobility.
- ✓ Turn to Chapter 11 for some abdominal-specific exercises that focus on working your core even more than the other kettlebell moves.
- ✓ Go to Chapter 12 for details on how to do the five ultimate kettlebell exercises that test your body from head to toe and further increase your strength and cardiovascular endurance.

To wrap up, Chapter 13 provides a few routines built from these advanced exercises (with a few basic exercises and combinations thrown in for good measure).

Kettlebells for Special Audiences

I address several categories of special audiences in Part IV of this book, and I offer a few variations for exercises so that, no matter what your circumstances are, you can get started right away with your kettlebell routine. These audiences include young adults, baby boomers, and seniors; pregnant women as well as women who have just given birth; athletes of all levels; and people who are rehabbing from injury or in the process of major weight loss.

Young adults, boomers, and seniors



Whether you're a young adult, a baby boomer, or a senior, you can find success with a kettlebell workout. I've worked with all these age groups, and I haven't found much difference between what you can do with kettlebells compared with what someone who's considered an average exerciser can do. Typically, if you fall into one of these categories, the only differences are that you use a lighter weight than the average person and your workouts don't

last as long. Some exercises I don't recommend for a beginner young adult, boomer, or senior, but, as time goes on and you get more confident with the workout, most of the exercises in this book will be a good fit for you.

Flip to Chapter 14 for the full scoop on adjusting your kettlebell workout if you're a young adult, a boomer, or a senior.

Pregnant women and women who have just delivered

As I wrote this book, I was pregnant with my second child. I exercised with kettlebells throughout my first pregnancy, used them to melt away the baby fat after my baby was born, and continued to use them during my second pregnancy. Not only have I always felt energetic, strong, and mobile, but I've never experienced any back pain typical of most pregnant women. In addition, I've had lots of strength, energy, and flexibility to keep up with my toddler.



Being pregnant is a wonderful time to begin a workout routine if you haven't already been doing one. As long as your doctor gives you the okay to do strength training during your pregnancy, you'll find so many benefits from exercising regularly; plus, you'll be in the routine of exercising when the baby comes, so you won't have to work as hard to jump right back in post baby. Refer to Chapter 15 for complete guidelines and exercises for when you're either pregnant or looking to get your pre-baby body back after you have the baby.

Athletes of all levels

Athletes of all levels find that kettlebells deliver an incredible endurance- and power-building workout in a very short period of time. If you're a busy athlete, you don't have a lot of time to do fitness programs other than your sport; you need a program that directly carries over and mimics the movements you do in your sport. Because kettlebells build so much core strength, a kettlebell workout transfers completely and immediately to any sport, from track to football and everything in between.

Check out Chapter 16 for pointers on using kettlebells if you're a high-level athlete, a recreational athlete, or just a weekend warrior.

Folks recovering from an injury or undergoing substantial weight loss

If you've gone through rehab and are ready to engage in strength training, kettlebells can be a good alternative to the limiting exercises in traditional weight training. One of the most appealing advantages of using kettlebells to complete your rehabilitation program is that the exercises use full ranges of motion and mimic everyday movements. However, you must have your doctor's okay to use kettlebells to rehab and be conservative in your approach for doing so. Use the guidelines in Chapter 17 to get started.

Here's another scenario to consider: If you have a lot of weight to lose and have tried everything else with no success or just plain hate to exercise, kettlebells may be just what you need. Although using kettlebells effectively will take work and perseverance, you don't find many reasonable and safe exercise programs that burn as many calories in as short amount of time as kettlebells. Plus, kettlebells are easy to use (with the right instructions — which is where I come in), are adaptable to all fitness levels, and, best of all, can be done from the privacy of your own home. Start with the exercises in Chapter 17 and then progress to use the programs throughout the book to continue your weight-loss journey.