

Kettlebells

Question: I workout at home and enjoy using new products to spice up my training. I have read a lot about Kettlebells and Kettlebell training, and I wonder if you can shed some light on this product and style of workout. I use handweights and dumbbells for my toning workouts. Are Kettlebells more effective?

Answer: Kettlebells originated in Russia and have been around for decades. However, they were practically unheard of in North America until recently. Now they are quickly becoming one of the hottest fitness products in the United States. They have become a favored training tool by many professional athletes and elite-level trainers.

Kettlebells are usually made out of cast iron. They look like a bowling ball with a large suitcase handle on top. Some versions are color-coded by weight and/or covered in a plastic coating (which can help prevent the Kettlebell from scratching other surfaces, such as the floor). They range from 2 pounds to over 100 pounds.

One of the great advantages to using Kettlebells for strengthening and toning is their versatility. They can be used instead of dumbbells for many traditional isolated exercises. However, their unique shape and the oversized handle also allows you to use them for more dynamic, multi-dimensional exercises that can train more than one muscle group and body part at a time.

Signature Kettlebell training exercises include "cleans," "windmills," and "swings," and generally involve multiple movements with controlled momentum. Imagine squatting down to pick up a Kettlebell with each hand, then lifting the Kettlebells up toward your waist, then bending your elbows and rotating the Kettlebells up and around the outside of your shoulders in one singular, fluid motion. Then repeating this sequence in reverse, and performing multiple times.

This type of complex, compound exercise not only uses many muscle groups, it also can burn more total calories than traditional dumbbell exercises and increase your breathing rate. Many experts also believe these types of movements are helpful in improving your ability to perform everyday tasks, such as picking up your child or lifting and carrying a heavy bag of groceries.

As with any fitness product or training program, it is important to make wise choices about your product selection and the execution of the exercises. Here are some tips to increase your success with Kettlebells and Kettlebell training:

1. Choose Kettlebells that have a smooth handle and feel comfortable in your hands.
2. Choose your Kettlebell shape, weight and size carefully. You should be able to comfortably perform exercises with good form and control without any strain or pain.
3. Purchase a Kettlebell-specific instructional workout video, or make sure the Kettlebells you purchase come supplied with one. Since Kettlebell exercises can be more complex than many traditional exercises, learning how to use the Kettlebells can help minimize your risk of injury and maximize your results.
4. Consider paying for a workout session with a Personal Trainer who specializes in Kettlebell training. One-on-one coaching can make it easier to learn how to use the Kettlebells, help ensure you are doing the exercises correctly, and getting the most benefit.
5. Don't forget to cross train. Even if you enjoy Kettlebell training, you should still include cardio training, and other types of strength training and stretching into your routine. Cross training helps ensure that you get the most out of your exercise program and minimizes your chances of plateauing, which can make it harder to reach your fitness goals.

Incorporating Kettlebells and Kettlebell training is great way to add variety and new challenge to your workout regime. They are as effective as dumbbells, but allow you to perform a variety of additional exercises that would not be possible with traditional weights. However, as with any exercise product or program, it is important to use common sense, start slow and build progressively until you feel comfortable with the new movements and exercises.