



Practical Considerations for a Kettlebell Session

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Introduction

Kettlebells are not your average piece of gym kit. They require skill to lift safely and the movement patterns that kettlebell exercises use, require participant safety to be of the highest priority

Instructor and equipment considerations

As a kettlebell instructor, you should be:

- Smart and dressed appropriately for kettlebell lifting
 - Clothing should be well fitted (tight) – especially over legs
- Professional at all times
- Punctual

Equipment:

- A range of kettlebell weights should be provided
- Enough of each weight for all participants (nobody should lift heavy out of necessity)
- Kettlebells should be clean and handles should be smooth

Venue considerations

The venue that you choose should ideally meet certain requirements:

1. Flat, stable surface
2. Enough space for participants
3. Suitable temperature and well ventilated

Other considerations would include:

- Floor surface to be scratch-proof (or use felt or rubber coated kettlebells)
- A space for kettlebells not in use to be stored (a tidy working area should always be kept to minimise accident risk)
- Ideally, a kettlebell lifting platform similar to a weightlifting platform should be used
- Each venue to be risk assessed and the instructor to have a knowledge of Emergency Action Plan

Injury considerations

To minimise risk of injury, please be aware of the following points:

- Dropping of equipment is common, therefore appropriate footwear should be worn unless the client is happy to accept liability for injury (there are benefits to training barefooted, though in a class situation this is not recommended)
- Incorrect technique is common and must be corrected (forces are high in kettlebell lifting and therefore potential to cause harm is increased)
- Grip can loosen during a set of repetitions and over the duration of the session, therefore be aware that lighter loads than estimated may be required
- Hands may become sore through use with callouses common. The use of gloves however is not a fix for this!
- Forearms and bicep area may develop bruising whilst the client perfects technique

Participant considerations

Your clients must be physically ready and mentally prepared for your session. Therefore it is advisable for you to:

1. Complete a written Pre Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PARQ) and verbal screening before each session
2. Complete a physical screening process that checks for:
 1. Mobility
 2. Technical ability
 3. Training age
 4. Current strength and fitness

By completing the above checks you are effectively risk stratifying in order to either:

1. Group participants according to ability
2. Provide suitable progressions and regressions for all participants
3. Exclude individuals from participating on safety grounds

Participant contraindications

Contraindications to participation in a kettlebell session would include:

- Pregnancy/postnatal
- History of lower back pain
- Hypertension
- Osteoarthritis
- Osteoporosis

*Please note that kettlebell sessions may be adapted for the above client groups provided that the instructor holds additional qualifications that specifically cover the highlighted contraindication and that they make appropriate adaptations.

Style considerations

Of the 3 styles of kettlebell training (hard, GS and Crossfit), all have their worth. It is possible to combine all three styles into a single workout. However, your clients may struggle to adapt styles unless they have a background in kettlebell lifting. Therefore it may be advisable to use one style, until all participants have mastered that style. The most logical progression route through the styles would be:

1. Hardstyle – This teaches excellent form and is closer to traditional gym work
2. GS – This uses a modified technique and requires some posture changes that should only be attempted by an already strong person
3. Crossfit – The combination of hardstyle and GS would be best undertaken by someone already familiar with them individually

Kettlebell class types

Kettlebells can be used in a variety of training styles:

- Specific kettlebell classes
- Personal Training
- Kettlebell sport training
- Outdoor training
- Bootcamps
- Circuit classes
- Rehabilitation

Functional movement/neuromuscular coordination

The real advantage of kettlebell training over other forms of resistance training is the ability to make the movements more 'functional' (functional meaning realistic to everyday movement patterns). This is enabled by:

- The handle of the kettlebell being offset to the load (unlike a dumbbell) – this causes a degree of instability requiring control
- The movement patterns in kettlebell training tend to be whole-body – meaning that there is a high stimulus for neurological coordination
- Kettlebell movements require the participant to overcome inertia, control momentum and stabilise throughout an exercise
- Kettlebell exercises require and therefore encourage a high degree of mobility at all joints

Other benefits of kettlebell training

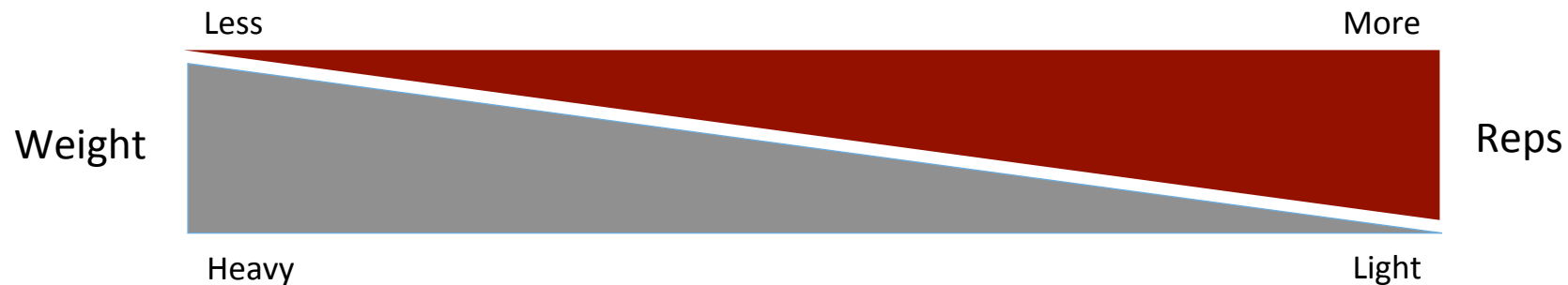
- Sports performance can be improved through kettlebell use
- Core strength and stability is greatly enhanced
- Muscular strength, power and endurance is improved, specifically:
 - Grip strength
 - Hip 'snap' (rapid hip extension)
 - Posterior chain strengthening
- Flexibility improvement
- Postural improvement

The strength continuum

Kettlebells are an excellent tool with which the whole strength continuum can be trained, albeit most likely with different styles!

By changing the kettlebell weight, reps and effort put into each exercise, participants can train for: strength and power, hypertrophy (muscle growth), strength endurance and cardiovascular fitness.

The relationship between reps and kettlebell weight is inverse.



The strength continuum

Although kettlebell workouts are not traditionally programmed the same as other resistance training workouts such as barbell or dumbbell, the same outcomes can be achieved through use of the traditional weight/repetition model:

	Repetitions	Weight (%1RM)	Sets	Rest between sets	Notes
Strength	1-5	85-100	1-5	3-5 mins	Use hardstyle
Hypertrophy	6-11	70-85	3-8	30s-2mins	Use hardstyle
Strength-endurance	12-20	60-70	1-5	30s-1min	Use either hardstyle or GS style
Cardiovascular	21-150	<60	1-4	Up to 60 mins	Use GS style
Power	1-8	40-80	1-5	3-5 mins	Use either hardstyle or GS style, with an emphasis on speed – Intend to move fast should be maximal. Kettlebell should come to a natural stop with gravity

The whole-body workout

As mentioned on the previous slide, though it is perfectly acceptable, kettlebell workouts are not always prescribed via rep/weight for selected muscle groups. Instead, repetitions can be timed for a period of seconds or even (particularly in GS style lifting) minutes. Often, routines that combine multiple exercises are programmed. These routines carry a high metabolic stimulus, making them an effective whole-body workout that combine CV with conditioning and strength benefits.

Ultimately, the way you programme your kettlebell workout will depend upon:

- Participant goals
- Participant skill level
- Participant fitness level

Find a balance

Many kettlebell workouts are posterior chain dominant – hamstrings, glutes and particularly lower back do much of the extension work in the swing, clean and snatch – which can make up a large proportion of a workout

Lower back pain can result if appropriate measures are not taken to balance out a programme. This is due to the hip and back extensors becoming over-tight and potentially causing a hyper-lordosis

For that reason, care must be taken to programme in a balance of abdominal and other trunk flexor muscle exercises, as well as lower back and glute stretching

Normal spine



Lordosis of the spine



Exaggerated lumbar curve

Progression

Many kettlebell exercises are ballistic in nature. For sedentary clients or those with little training history in kettlebells, training with kettlebells can therefore be a high stress above and beyond their capabilities. You must ensure that appropriate training principles are applied. You should consider the strength continuum as well as the FITT principles:

- Frequency of training sessions
- Intensity of training sessions
- Time (duration) of each workout
- Type of exercises included

Progression

	Beginner	Advanced
Frequency	1-2 sessions per week	3-5 sessions per week
Intensity	Low – lighter weights with an emphasis on skill, technique and stability acquisition. As client fatigues session may be ended in order that the client does not learn incorrect movement patterns	Low to high – heavier weights may be used. Client can exercise through to exhaustion. Be aware that technique/form may be compromised by fatigue. At an advanced level, this is often acceptable as is part of the process of working maximally
Time	5-10 mins Within a session, exercise work time should be balanced with rest time. This may initially be on a 1:3 work:rest ratio. Rest times should be utilised as coaching opportunities	20-60 mins Depending upon your client's fitness, the work:rest ratio may be as high as 4:1
Type	Movement mechanics/simple/grinds Sagittal, frontal and transverse planes may be used in isolation with progression to multi-planar exercises Unilateral and bilateral movements	Full spectrum of exercises including: Complex/ballistic Multi-planar exercises may be used Unilateral and bilateral movements

SPORT principles

Kettlebell programmes should:

- Be **S**pecific to client's needs
- **P**rogress the client at a suitable pace in terms of kettlebell weight, repetitions and sets of exercises and complexity of movement
- **O**verload the client's physiological systems to cause a training stimulus (but not so much to break or overtrain them!)
- Take account of **R**egression of fitness
- Not be **T**edius

Essential instructor skills

As a kettlebell instructor you must:

- Observe your client's technique- take a step back and look from head to toe at what is good and what might need fixing or improving
- Have a number of coaching cues available to correct technique. These should include, verbal, visual and kinaesthetic approaches. Finding analogies that paint a picture, use of slow motion video and equipment like 'posture sticks' all have their merit
- Gain feedback from your client through verbal and visual methods. Use open questions and listen!
- Be able to respond to your clients needs and adapt exercises with suitable progressions and regressions of tempo, intensity, volume etc
- Give feedback to your client that is accurate, appropriate, constructive and motivational
- Reflect on your performance and analyse strengths and weaknesses – then make an action plan to improve!

Session plan

A kettlebell session should always be planned and if possible, client's progression within it recorded. The session plan should include:

- Specific session objectives highlighted
- Session duration and exercise duration
- Planned exercise order
- Work:rest ratio's
- Exercise selection
- Adaptations and alternatives (your Plan B)

The session plan should be clear and structured and use an appropriate format. It is useful to consider that another instructor should be able to understand the session plan and deliver your session identically from it!