

## SWING IN THE NEW YEAR WITH KETTLEBELLS

*By Ruth Martens, M.D., D.Ht.*

To some of us, kettlebells may be new or foreign. In truth, kettlebells have been used in Russia for centuries. They were also used in the US in the early 1900's but fell out of popularity. About 10 years ago interest in this country was renewed and kettlebells have made appearances on TV shows like The Biggest Loser and now are sold everywhere from fitness stores to Walmart. So what's all the hoopla about?

A kettlebell isn't a bell at all. It resembles a cannonball with a handle. They are available in weights from 5 to 106 pounds. **A kettlebell is a nearly indestructible tool that can be used anywhere for all around fitness.** In just 1-2 hours per week you can increase strength, flexibility, endurance, get a great cardio workout and lose fat.

But **why use a kettlebell instead of dumbbells?** It is a fact that most dumbbell exercises can be done with a kettlebell. Kettlebell exercises, on the contrary, are core strengthening and involve entire muscle chains. The result is increased strength without looking like a body builder. Some of the exercises have been used to rehabilitate injured joints and strengthen lower back weakness by physical therapists. As always, check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program if you are out of shape or you have any question of your ability to do exercise.

**What is the best way to get started?** Books are available (*Enter the Kettlebell* by Pavel), DVD's are sold (*Power to the People* with Pavel Tsatsouline), and websites have video clips demonstrating the techniques ([www.performbetter.com](http://www.performbetter.com) under training) but if you are like me you learn faster when shown in person. **A free kettlebell clinic is run periodically at Fitness Factory Outlet in Naperville** by a certified kettlebell trainer. I attended the December clinic and found it informative and useful. Steve and his wife Toni demonstrated technique and then corrected us as we tried the same exercises. They answered questions like what weight to start with, what exercises to start with and when to add weight and more exercises. It is important for a trainer to be certified specifically in kettlebells as some fitness trainers are teaching kettlebells incorrectly. As with any exercise, correct form helps to speed progress, minimize injury and ensure safety. It is best to start with one or two exercises and a weight you can lift easily. When you have built up to many reps, then increase the weight. Don't be surprised (even if you already exercise regularly) if a few minutes swinging a kettlebell leaves you breathless. Start slow and don't overdo it.

**How much do kettlebells cost?** Kettlebells can run anywhere from \$1.00 - \$2.00/pound. Some are sold in a package with an instructional DVD. The kettlebell can be painted, vinyl coated or just plain steel. Personal preference comes into play here but I found out the hard way that paint can chip easily (even rolling around in your trunk on the way home) and rough areas on the handle can cause blisters. Look for smooth handles and a flat bottom so the kettlebell sits square and doesn't fall over.

Most of you know I hate exercise. Anything that can give me a shorter more efficient workout is likely to help me stick to an exercise program. In addition, I've found kettlebells to be **more fun** to use than dumbbells. I can get strength and cardio in the same workout in a short period of time with an emphasis on core strength.

Kettlebells may be the perfect exercise tools to make your year the best you've ever had. And that has a great ring to it.

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