

The Kettlebell Swing

The Kettlebell (KB) Swing has grown in popularity within the Gym Industry over the past decade. However, it is an exercise that I believe is miss understood and wrongly coached, which devalues the whole importance of what it is suppose to do.

Have a think about what you see in the gym. Are people around you doing a KB Swing or an American Swing, which is popular in the CrossFit world. Have a look at this video and see if even you might be doing the American version <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d94xX-AQZ0A>.

In my opinion, Personal Trainers should be encouraging clients to use the KB Swing as an alternative exercise to get power development, which is also known as speed strength. Power/Speed is crucial actions involving change of direction, acceleration and jumping, which is great if you play any sport recreationally or for fun with your mates.

Another interesting point to note is that IF YOU CANNONT Olympic lift. Meaning, the gym doesn't allow you too, you are injured or you find Olympic lifting too technical. You can use KB Swings for a safer and effective workout. This is why well respected Strength and Conditioning coaches are implementing KB swing for athletes, older and younger clients.

Building the Foundations, forget the ego

Before you start even lifting up the Kettlebell, there is one main cautionary note worth noting. Can you touch your toes?



Have you got a solid kettlebell Deadlift? (photo on the left).

If they are answered wit a no. Then its back to the drawing board and start working on mobility stretches and get a solid hip-hinge sorted (which is explained later). If the questions were answered yes, then it's time to move onto common mistakes to look out for.

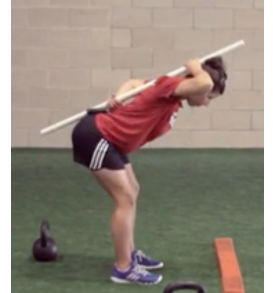
Firstly, one of the biggest fails I see people doing the KB Swing is squatting. The swing is a hip-dominant movement with hip flexion and should not have a big knee bend. Next on the list is people using their arms and deltoids (shoulders). This is not an upper body exercise, so if you are feeling it in your arms, that is not the direction you want to be heading. Lastly, another common mistake seen is rounding of the back. This is hugely dangerous and potentially the most likely mistake to get someone injured.

Explosive lifting can be a fun and challenging when done correctly. The ego needs to be left at the door, put less emphasise on the amount of weight lifted and focus on developing a solid technique.

Hips Don't Lie

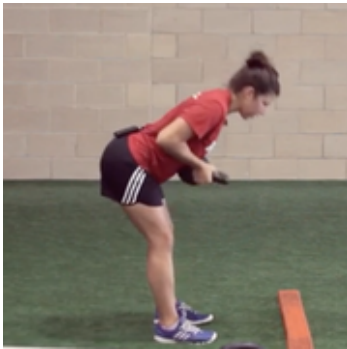
Earlier it was stated that you need to have a solid kettlebell deadlift. The main movement for the deadlift and kettlebell swing should be via the Hip Hinge, which is the pattern also used for RDLs. However, completing this with perfect form and control can be challenging, hence why you hear of injury rates increasing during the deadlift etc.

As a coach, I would initially coach a client to use a dowel, which is a cylinder rod (photo on right), which is usually made from plastic and use the following instructions:



- Get feet in deadlift position
- Position dowel behind the back running vertically down the spine.
- Three points of contact (tail bone, mid back and back of head)
- Keep these three points throughout the hip hinge.

After you are competent with this, the next progression would be getting rid of the dowel and putting a weight on the chest (photo on the left). The movement should be the same and the person should be feeling it posteriorly. If they are struggling, then regress the exercise by using a beam to ensure the toes are up and BAM they'll feel it now.



To progress to the swing, the person should now set the kettlebell in front of their body. This will look similar to a NFL player about to snap/hike the football (photo below right). The shoulders should be back, chest up and strong, lats are squeezed and locked, which engages the core.

The person should then explosively hip-hinge backwards and the forwards to maintain the action. I like to cue 'imagine two pieces of paper under your armpits', which will stop the person using their arms.

If you follow these tips, you should have a solid kettlebell swing. Thank me later.



Programming

Another point I hate is seeing classes using the kettlebell swing for a 45 second period or minute period. After twenty seconds it can be easy to disengage from the movement and the form dramatically affected and people's backs are holding on for dear life. Additionally, the fittest of athlete would struggle to generate maximum power for that period of time.

Therefore, power should be considered how quickly you can use your strength. Every PT should know specifics for power, which is heavy forces in short high speed movements for a few repetitions with longer rest periods. This will encourage explosive performance with low fatigue. I would recommend doing 4-8 repetitions with three sets and at least 90 seconds of rest.

Hope this article was an eye opener.