

Move over dumbbells, you've got competition

**With proper supervision and form,
kettlebells provide tougher workout in less time than traditional weights**

By Erika Rose - Times Correspondent | Posted: Sunday, November 15, 2009 12:00 am

In a small fitness studio on the Square in Crown Point, there are some women throwing some serious weight around.

Traditional dumbbells have taken a back seat here, making way for a centuries-old modality that is new on the scene in Northwest Indiana.

Angela Ramos, owner of Inspiration Fitness Camp, demonstrates how to use a kettlebell, which looks like a flat-bottomed cannonball with a handle. With origins in Russia, this ball of iron is a favorite tool of professional athletes, Olympians, military units, and Hollywood personalities.

With the utmost control and flawless exercise stance, which she knows is especially critical in this type of ballistic exercise for results and injury prevention, Ramos concentrates on bracing her core while swinging the kettlebell straight out in front of her, back down as if she is hiking a football, and back up again.

Controlling the momentum and force of a swinging kettlebell adds another element to strength training. This single movement works her glutes, hamstrings, quadriceps, core, lower and upper back muscles and gets her heart pumping to boot.

Ramos says 20 minutes plus warm-up and cool-down is all that is needed to achieve the same calorie burn and strength building that typically takes people about an hour and a half to accomplish in a traditional gym.

The time factor is a major draw for Maria Burk, of Valparaiso, one of Ramos' clients, who is so excited about the results she saw from her kettlebell workouts, she decided to seek official training in the Russian sport.

She attended the Russian Kettlebell Challenge in St. Paul, Minn., in September and now, she is performing moves like the Turkish get-up. Imagine lying comfortably on the floor when someone hands you a heavy kettlebell and you have to get into a standing position and hoist the weight triumphantly over your head before getting back down into the same position. Talk about working every muscle in your body, including a few you never knew existed.

A former "gym rat," Burk says kettlebells liberated her from the gym. She had been spending hours upon hours on weight machines and treadmills en route to her 30-pound weight loss.

Burk now serves as a substitute kettlebell trainer for Ramos and hopes to help bring Ramos' Inspiration Fitness Kettlebell Camps to Valparaiso.

Another key element of kettlebell workouts is the focus on functionality over aesthetics.

"Most people when they work out, they are only focused on what they see in the mirror and neglect the posterior chain -- the upper back, the glutes, the hamstrings," Ramos says. "If you don't have that posterior chain, you end up with back problems, knee problems. People think that when their backs are bothering them, it's because they need to workout their back. The truth is, they need to work on their glute strength and their hamstrings."

In layman's terms, this means that it's an integrated exercise that translates into movements of everyday living. In traditional weight lifting, you may work the bicep in isolation, for instance, but that bicep strength doesn't necessarily translate into an enhanced ability to lift a child or bag of groceries.

Fabio Comana, exercise physiologist and spokesman for the American Council on Exercise (ACE), endorses kettlebells as an advanced form of training.

"There are certain benefits it gives you that other forms of training don't," he says. "That's why I'm sort of a fan of them."

He explains that swinging a kettlebell puts excessive forces on the body because you have to work to control the momentum of a weight with an offset center of mass. It's an effective calorie burner too because it integrates more muscles and joints simultaneously, thus more oxygen and energy is being burned.

However, it's not ideal for the out-of-shape individual, he cautions, as stabilizing the body in the manner required is not an easy task for the layperson. Therefore, Comana says, anyone who wants to try a kettlebell workout should do so under supervision of a trainer who can help you build a fitness foundation and stabilize your body correctly.

"When you lift," he says, "you'd better control the joints, because of the offset center of mass and the fact that it creates a lot of what we call angular torque, or angular momentum."

Fitness Pointe in Munster is joining the local kettlebell movement. While they are not available for general use, personal trainers are currently getting educated about them through Kara Kramer, exercise specialist. The trainers are beginning to incorporate them with their clients and small group coaching is in future plans to introduce them to general members.

Kramer likes the way kettlebell workouts engage multiple muscles simultaneously, thus providing a total body workout in a shorter amount of time. For athletes and fit individuals, it gives a stagnant workout a swift kick.

"It gives you a greater range of motion unlike traditional weight lifting because of the way it is offset, by the way it is designed," she says. "It also increases explosive power and helps with athletes. It can help them handle extreme acceleration and deceleration forces, helps them with sudden stops and direction changes."

For Burk, the kettlebell has changed the way she work outs forever.

"There's no way I could go back to a regular gym and get back on the gerbil wheel of the treadmill," Burk says.

For information on kettlebell training at Inspiration Fitness Camp as well as Ramos' boot camps for women, visit www.inspirationfitnesscamp.com or call (219) 779-0500.

For information on Russian Kettlebell Challenge certificate programs, as well as books, tapes, equipment, visit www.dragondoor.com.

Take a look at this week's Shore Weekender video for more information and a sample of a kettlebell workout: <http://www.nwitimes.tv/p/?section=video&id=7252908>

DVD Workouts:

- * "Kettlebell Concepts: Total Body KB Blast," by Keli Roberts. (Idea, \$44.95) www.idealife.com
- * "10 Minute Solution: Kettlebell Ultimate Fat Burner" (Anchor Bay Entertainment, \$14.95)
- * Kettleworx: Has a variety of DVD workouts for the full body as well as specific areas of the body. Kettlebells are included with some packages, www.kettleworx.com.
- * "3-Week Boot Camp" by Denise Austin. Includes a "kettlebell-inspired toning workout," in which free weights are used. Available in December. (Lionsgate, \$14.95) www.lionsgate.com
- * Power Systems: Has equipment, DVDs, books and a training poster. www.power-systems.com (800) 321-6975.

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