

Kettlebells 101

RAMON SODANO: Hello everyone and welcome to Global Connections, Kettlebells 101. I'd first like to thank you if you attended our last webinar, which was the Train Smart, 7 Principles of Movement. Global Connections is pairing with us on Wellbeing Online. And we're hoping to get these webinars going more and more often, because we feel like we have a lot of good information to offer to you. And I hope you guys keep up with us.

So for those of you that were here last time, my name is Ramon Sodano. I am the Coordinator of Fitness Services and Safety Education over at Washington State University. Along with me here is one of my personal trainers and fitness interns. Her name is Natalie Reeves and I'll have her introduce herself here in a second. We're going to give a little brief introduction of ourselves, so you can kind of know who's talking to you about what's going on.

So like I said, I'm a coordinator for fitness here. I have been a personal trainer and strength conditioning coach for the last 10 years. I received my bachelor's degree in kinesiology from Washington State University and also my Masters from Washington State University in sport management. We're going to be talking today, obviously about the kettlebells. And this is a tool that throughout my entire career, I have used in multiple different formats with multiple different people. So I'll let Natalie give her little introduction herself here as well.

NATALIE REEVES: I'm Natalie Reeves. I'm a personal trainer here at the SRC as well as an intern. I just graduated here from WSU with my undergrad degree in sports science. And currently working under Ramon as the personal trainer intern.

RAMON SODANO: So it's actually quite the honor to get the fitness intern position here. It's a very fought after position. And Natalie actually did a really good job with us for as a personal trainer and CrossFit coach and all the like. We're very lucky to have her. She's probably a better coach than myself.

So we're going to talk about what we're going to be getting into today. And again, it's Kettlebells 101. But we're really going to be talking about one exercise and that's the kettlebell swing. We'll do a breakdown of it. That's going to show you another exercise as well that is kind of a regression of it, that you can build up to help you create good form and a good motor pattern for your kettlebell swing.

So we'll start with just a basic introduction of the kettlebell. I got our little itinerary up here with

my awesome handwriting. I apologize for that. I was once a teacher and my students used to make fun of my handwriting quite a bit.

Then we'll go into an introduction of the swing. We'll let you see what it looks like from the beginning, so we'll kind of do a top down progression. We'll show you what the swing looks like, and some common faults, we'll talk about it very briefly. And then we'll break down the kettlebell swing by starting from something called the kettlebell RDL. And that's a certain exercise. That is a very good segue or lead in to the kettlebell swing.

Then we'll go back to the kettlebell swing. And we'll break it down. Talk about the form, exactly what we're looking for, common faults with it, things not to do, and things to do. And then we have closing. And we'll talk about some things that are happening in the future and we'll take questions at that time.

So to dive into it. First of all, the kettlebell was originally created in Russia. Actually it's a very versatile tool that these individuals created that can be used for multiple different formats of fitness. Like, it is literally probably one of the most versatile tools you can utilize in whatever fitness programming that you have. It can almost do-- it can do a lot of things for your programming with regard to power, strength, endurance, mobility, stability. It has a lot of different facets to it.

But the one thing with the kettlebells, after the Russians kind of brought it out to the world and people started seeing this tool. A lot of people started using it incorrectly. And there's a lot of different schools of thought on it. And the fact of the matter that these different schools of thought led to a lot of injuries and asymmetries built on people, just because people saw these exercises and were like, well, I bet you I can make it better. And try to do xy and z for it.

So we just want to kind of break one of the main exercises that you always see down with it and show how to do it safely. But before we get into all that and since this is Kettlebells 101, we're going to talk about the kettlebell itself and certain positions that kettlebell can have. OK? So we'll be real basic.

So when looking at the kettlebell, you have two parts of it essentially. You have the handle and you have the bell. OK. So again, handle and bell. Two parts to the kettlebell. Simple, right?

So there is a couple of positions that one can get into with the kettlebell. The one that we're really going to focus in on today is this double overhand position. Other positions that you may

see, so if you're ever looking into programming, like I don't know what that means. There's other ones too. So if I'm at the side and I'm holding the kettlebell at my side, this is called the suitcase position. OK. You can have the kettlebell up, into a rack position as well with the kind of racked against the arm. When you do this position, you really want to make sure that you're stacking the bones and stacking the joints. So my wrist isn't flared out here like this. My wrist is straight up and down and my elbow is directly underneath it.

Then you have an overhead position. OK. Again, when we're in overhead position, I'm going to have my wrist, my elbow, and my shoulder all stacked in one.

Another position you see, I'm going to grab a lighter kettlebell because I don't think I can throw the 50 over my head like that, is what we call a bottoms up position. So this is a much more advanced position. And there's a lot of exercises that you can do with it like overhead carry presses and things of that nature. But, it is a lot more advanced than your typical overhead position.

When you're in these positions there are certain things that need to be focused on, but the main one is whenever I'm racked, overhead, bottoms up is we don't want to be extending at the back and having the ribs lifted up. Those are some common faults that we often see.

So again, with the kettlebell, we have the bell or the bell and the handle. We have our double overhand position. We have our suitcase position. Rack position, overhead, and then bottoms up. You will do things double-handed, singlehandedly. It just depends on the exercise. OK.

Natalie, do you have anything to add?

NATALIE REEVES:No.

RAMON SODANO:No. OK cool. So that kind of brings us into what the swing is. So again, when we're going to be talking about the swing today, we're going to be using the Russian school of thought. A lot of people have heard about the American swing. We're not going to be doing that today. And it is definitely-- there is a small amount of the population, if you do know what the American swing is, that's when we're coming all way up overhead. It's a very small amount of the population that should be able that is able to do that because it calls for a lot of mobility in the shoulder region, especially. And if it's not done correctly, it can really lead to a lot of injuries and a lot of just bad things happening to the body.

The Russian swing, for instance, it's just much easier to do. And it puts you in a safer position

all the way, just all around. So again, this is a foundational exercise of most kettlebell exercises. So the swing leads into a lot of other exercises. So it can lead in your kettlebell clean, your kettlebell snatch, single arm swings, a lot of things like that. And that's why I really wanted to break it down with everyone today, because it's one that you see all the time. And it can be used in multiple formats, but it is just often seen wrong.

It's not-- it's easy to do it wrong. It's easy to do it right. But there's just small little tips and tricks that we're going to give you today that really help making doing the kettlebell swing correctly. Again, and I kind of touched on this earlier, but this exercise can be utilized in multiple formats of fitness. So you can use this exercise to develop power. You can use this exercise to develop strength. You can use this exercise develop endurance. That all kind of comes with how you program it and the weight that you use with it.

So what we're going to do is, I talked about this top down progression. And I'm going to have Natalie demonstrate a kettlebell swing.

Do you want to grab this one? Let's have you face me right now. And she's going to go into this. And we're going to talk about all the positions that she's starting from. Bring that out in front of your head. And get to that height position. And she is going to show you a couple reps of the kettlebell swing. And her hands are sweaty. So whenever you're ready.

So we're not really going to break down the swing just yet. I'm just letting you see what we're moving into. So this is exactly what the kettlebell swing looks like. You can set it down now. So what we're going to do now is, we're going to break down the kettlebell swing by turning this into an exercise called the kettlebell RDL. RDL stands for Romanian Deadlift. And the Romanian Deadlift, you can use with a barbell, with all kinds of different materials you see in the gym.

So the kettlebell RDL and the kettlebell swing are both what we call a hinging exercise. A hinging exercise is one that is really calling on your posterior chain. So it's calling on your butt and your hamstrings a lot. We're going to protect our low back with what we do with our kettlebell swing today, so we're not using our erectors a lot. And what we do are really, really calling on our glutes for the most part and our hamstrings as well.

So what I'm going to have Natalie do is, she is going to come up. And we're going to start developing her credible RDL. So the RDL essentially is. I'll show you what a full rep of an RDL looks like. You will start with the kettlebell a little bit behind your feet. Come down. Have a soft

bend of the knees, pick that kettlebell up. Squeeze. Bring it down. Back up. So that's the entire RDL.

So we're going to teach you how to develop this pattern correctly. So Natalie, come in here. So what I'm going to have her do first is, she's going to hinge backwards. So this hinge, what this means is she is pushing her butt back. And she's loading her hamstrings and she's putting the weight of the body in the heel of her feet. So I'm going to have her hinge back, tap the kettlebell with her hand, and stand back up. Do it about two or three times.

So she's hinging back. Again. One more time. Good. So what I want you to think about at this point is that she's hinging back. Think of yourself as a spring and you are coiling a spring. And what you're doing is, right when you get to this motion, where you grab, when you touch that kettlebell, you're ready to explode up. That spring is loaded.

So now we're going to have Natalie come back here and hinge back down and pick the kettlebell up. So she's going to hinge back, soft bend in the knees. Stand up. She is squeezing her butt cheeks at the top here. OK, what did you call it again?

NATALIE REEVES: Holding a credit card in your butt.

RAMON SODANO: Yeah, she's holding a credit card between her butt cheeks. So, and we're going to do another credit card here, keeping it a little bit. So bring it back down. She pushes her butt back, and back up. So I want you to face to the front and grab that kettlebell and turn to the front.

There's very important things that come with where your arm placement's going to be with your kettlebell RDL. So she has her arms tight to her body when she's doing this. So this is where I'll tell about, you have credit cards in between your armpit and throughout the entire motion, credit cards won't fall. Or it's like somebody's trying to tickle you. Right? So, you know when somebody is trying to tickle you, you just real bunch up real tight, you don't want them to get their hands in your armpit. That's exactly what we're doing. And we maintain this positioning throughout the entire kettlebell RDL.

So while she hinges back, you'll see that her arms hinge, back stay exactly where they are, and then she comes back up. All right? And she's even having a little bit trouble with it right now, because she may not have the mobility exactly to get there. And we'll show you exactly how to limit that mobility so you can build someone all the way to the ground.

So again, arms are tight to the side, she pushes the hips back. And she has a soft bend in the knees. Right? We're not squatting. We are hinging. And I'm going to say that a lot of times today. So we always have this soft bend in the knees.

As she pulls the kettlebell up, grab it and pull it up, she's back to that position. And she is nice and tight the whole time. So this is our kettlebell RDL. So sit back down.

I just drew some sweet stick figures up here. And I had to draw them beforehand because I'm not much of an artist, but this is the difference between we have our kettlebell, this is a squat. And this is an RDL. So the squats call on a lot of mobility from the knees, hips, and ankles. The RDLs definitely pushing more back. We don't want to see the squat when we're doing our kettlebell deadlift, OK. We're not coming here. This is not what we're doing. We are hinging back. We're literally pushing the butt back, and as the butt can't go back any more, then we start to get that soft bend in the knees.

I will literally feel my arms touch the inside of my legs the whole time. I like to get it back and nice and far behind. So I feel my hands slide between my legs and this keeps my arms nice and tight. Because what happens a lot of time is what we call, giving up the low back. So if somebody hinges down and those arms come out, now my low back is compromised. OK. So if I don't keep my arms real tight to my body. And I come and I get this kettlebell and I pick it up here, I can already feel it in my low back. My butt and my hamstrings aren't working near as hard. So I need to keep it really nice and tight the whole time. OK?

So we don't squat with our kettlebell RDL. And this is to really talk about that. We do not squat in our kettlebell swing. So we just hammered away the kettlebell RDL really fast. The one thing I wanted to show you is if someone is having a little bit of trouble with their range of motion with a kettlebell RDL, you can bring the weight to them.

So the way to do that is you can set it on a step, you can set it on a plate, but now we have brought the kettlebell up. So you want to come in here? And this now limits the range of motion that she has to go through. So what I'm trying to do with her right now is I'm trying to build the proper motor pattern for her brain to understand what it's supposed to feel like.

So now she does her RDL stuff. Forward a little bit. She's going to be able to keep those arms tight the whole time. Grab that kettlebell and stand back up. And if you're an individual, just watch yourself in the mirror as you do it. And if you see that your arms-- come back down real quick. If you see-- let go of the kettlebell. If you see that your arms just always deviate and

come away, just start bringing that weight up to you until you can maintain that position, the good position the whole time. And then slowly, bring that, whatever you brought up to yourself, down. And it will literally help build that pattern. OK.

I think we've hammered away at the kettlebell RDL enough?

NATALIE REEVES: Got it.

RAMON SODANO: OK. So write those down and we'll talk about them at the end. So do you want to move that kettlebell? And I'll put this step back. Cool.

So I would always suggest that you probably should not go into your swing until you really perfect your kettlebell RDL. It's not extremely necessary, but with my clients and my athletes, I would always find that much more important. Because if I know they have a good RDL, then I know that they have in their head how to hinge, because the kettlebell swing is a dynamic explosive hinge. And it has-- the thing about the kettlebell swings is, it's much less range of motion than what the kettlebell RDL is. So having to maintain that pushing butt back and stuff is actually easier, but now we're in a real dynamic explosive motion that makes it a little bit more complex.

So a way that we like to start it with our athletes and our trainers is, I'll have them stand with me and I'll teach just two points of contact drill. OK. I did not make this up. I found this from other coaches. I wish I was this smart.

And I'll have them stand in the ending position of the kettlebell, which by the way, is shoulder height. We're not going above shoulder height. And we'll get back to that here in a little bit. So, Natalie come here. And let's have you turn this way actually, facing this way.

So she's in her ending position, with her with our hands up at shoulder height. And my two points of contact are on her shoulder and they're on her hip. And what I will do from this point is, I will tell her to maintain those two points of contact until I tell her to break. Because what happens a lot with the kettlebell swing is people automatically feel like they need to bend over right away. And that's going to turn either into a squat or really, really giving up the low back.

So I'll prime them like this. Here's my two points of contact. All right. Drop your arms. Go, go, go, go, break. And then, that was even a little too soon, right. So let's do a little bit more fluid. So drop the arms. Break. You went too soon. Let's go again.

Drop the arms and break. Can you try to do it in a fluid motion? Let's go. And break. So she's not-- come back up. One more time. And break.

So a huge thing that we're looking for-- come back to the top-- is as she comes down, we want to make sure, we don't want this kettlebell to pass her knees. So we want to make sure as she comes down, it's only coming back to here and we're not swinging that kettlebell past our knees. So that is like the first cue that we can give you all to make sure that you're doing a kettlebell correctly. Do not let the kettlebell swing past your knees when you're doing a kettlebell swing.

So in a great way, again, to do this is if you're doing this with your friends or anybody like that, the two points of contact. Have them drop and break. And we're doing good right there. So what happens is-- you're good. People just-- it's just counter-intuitive in the brain for some reason. They feel like they need to bend down right away and it's just not as normal to keep the hands, have the arms drop, and then have the body go.

So something really important to remember, and always remember, do not let the kettlebell past your knees. Once you start swinging a real big kettlebell, it may look like it's getting to your knees or passing a little bit, but it might just be the size of the bell. And that's when you're getting up to like your 80s and 90s and stuff like that.

Let me see if I wanted to talk about anything else.

So, there's two starting positions that you can essentially do from the kettlebell. And you saw at the beginning, she started like she's like hiking a football. So this is what I like to do. And this is how guys like Mike Boyle and Gray Cook and real, real, real top notch coaches have taught the kettlebell swing. And you can also start-- we'll show you the other starting position at first.

So what I'm going to have Natalie do. She's going to grab the 50 over here. So she's actually swinging a pretty good weight right now. Just have you set it right here. She's going to get into a position where she steps back. And the kettlebell's in front of her a little bit and she has to go get the kettlebell. And she's going to tilt it up on her side, on it's side.

So this is our starting position for the kettlebell swing. This primes us to swing it back and be right in that hinge position where we want to be. So it automatically primes that person to be there. So just hike it back real quick. Don't come up with it. Just hike it back and bring it back to the front. Does that make sense? I haven't had you do that. I have never-- you're about to see

something new. I've never primed Natalie in this way. So I'm going to have her hike it back and bring it back forward. Good. Again.

So this is getting her ready-- so now go to your swing. So boom. She swing, keep swinging. And we noticed, look, it is not passing her knees. We've gone to the point now, where she's not letting the kettlebell swing past her knees. And she's starting from the height position so now, what we talked with the kettlebell the RDL, this all goes into play.

So the entire time she's swinging, arms are tight to the body. She's coming up right, but she is still really tight in the lat. She's not flared out like this. She's tight the whole time. Natalie actually has a really good kettlebell swing And does a little different than me.

She has like-- how would you explain it? The soft elbows?

NATALIE REEVES: Yeah, keeping elbow to the side of your body.

RAMON SODANO: Yeah. And you'll see that she kind of swings up and has a little bend in the elbow. I don't do that necessarily, but she's just a little bit better at swinging than I am so, either is fine. But the main, main concern is to keep that arm tight to the body. And then we don't let the kettlebell swing past the knees. I'm going to say these things over and over and over again.

So, let's have you start swinging and give me about six to seven swings. Yep, from the good position. Start from your height position. So just go.

So again, we talked about coiling the spring. Every time she's coming down, and she is coiling the spring. She is loading her hamstring. She is loading her butt.

She is coiling, exploding. This is an explosive motion. She is popping her hips into place and literally squeezing her butt. You're good. I don't want to get you too tired.

So as you come up with this kettlebell swing, so I'm here. I'm up here. I'm literally squeezing my butt into place. You snap your hips. Be explosive with it. That also means that your shoulders and arms are doing none of the work. Your hips, your base is doing everything for you.

You should not be lifting the kettlebell to shoulder height with your arms. If you have to get to shoulder height by using your arms, lighten the weight and practice your swing. But I promise you if you use your hips properly and forcefully, you can throw some weight around, because

this is the strongest part of your body.

What am I missing?

NATALIE REEVES: The different starting position.

RAMON SODANO: Oh, the different starting position.

So, some people find getting the height position a little weird or a little hard at first. So a lot of people will come up. And if you grab the kettlebell, you should grab it correctly. Bringing up it up like an RDL. A lot of people just create the momentum-- bring it forward-- and then go into their swing. That's completely fine, as long as we do a couple of things.

We're not going to come up and just lazily pick up the kettlebell. We don't want that. Again, we've come down, pick it up properly.

Then we don't want to have it swing past the knees. This is the reason why I don't like this starting position because, this happens a lot. People are like OK, and now I go. And here I am. And people think this is a good swing right here. A lot of people would look at this as a great swing, but we want here. This shirt is really annoying. It's a cool shirt though.

So if you need to start that way, that's completely fine. But I would really, really prefer if you taught yourself how to be here. It just primes you to be in a better position.

So that is the kettlebell swing in a very, very small nutshell. So there tons of videos out there for it. I would recommend to look into guys like Mike Boyle, Gray Cook, Dan John, those individuals are great people that you can look into with kettlebell work, kettlebell swinging, all kinds of techniques.

And I can't not say Pavel. Right, so he has an awesome, old school DVD, Pavel does for kettlebells and it's pretty hilarious to watch now, but he's got some good techniques and good exercises in there. So kind of brings us literally to the end of our Kettlebells 101 with regard to the swing.

With that, yeah. Let's take some questions on--

The question was, how much weight is Natalie swinging? And how much is swinging it better than me? A lot. What do you usually swing?

NATALIE REEVES: Uh, 65, 70?

RAMON SODANO: 65 70. For how many reps?

NATALIE REEVES: Like, 10, 20.

RAMON SODANO: So she's a savage.

NATALIE REEVES: I try.

SPEAKER 1: And then the next question is, is there ever a time when a deadlift is done with straight legs?

RAMON SODANO: The question, is there a time, is there ever a time when a deadlift is done with straight legs? Yes. There is. There is a straight leg deadlift. I usually stay away from the straight leg deadlift. You have to be very, very prepped for it and primed for it and have the proper mobility for it. I think you can still get the development that you want through a Romanian Dead Lift, which is that soft bend deadlift. Even with that, you still kind of bend your knees on a straight leg deadlift a little bit.

NATALIE REEVES: Yeah.

RAMON SODANO: Yeah, it's just you take it all the way to the floor. And that would be done more on the straight bar. But yes, there is a time for it. The risk reward for me is just not worth it. I think I can still get the benefits I want from a typical deadlift and a Romanian Deadlift and kettlebell deadlifts, that I want. And I usually steer away from that. But, if you are comfortable doing it and you've been taught properly how to do it, yes go ahead.

SPEAKER 1: The question is, Ramon, do you encourage a neutral neck positioning for the kettlebell DL and the kettlebell swing? I noticed there's a difference in swing in the DR, RDL you demonstrates so I wanted to clarify.

RAMON SODANO: OK. So what this individual is talking about is how I was keeping my head up throughout the swings and the RDLs. You do want to keep a neutral posture. So if I am doing my kettlebell RDL, you actually don't want this head up position here. You are going to keep your neck and back straight the whole time. So someone's calling me out right now for not having neutral neck position. And I think I know who that is. So yes, you want neutral neck position in both of them. I sometimes just bring my chest up too much.

SPEAKER 1: When getting started, how many sets of swings should you do?

RAMON SODANO: So the question is, when getting started, how many sets of swings should you do? Well, first I

would say that you want to start by priming yourself with the kettlebell RDL patterning. So that would be just coming down and tapping. And you can get smoke doing the stuff for one to two sets. It just really depends on what your goals are. If, when getting started with programming and just understanding the motor pattern of the kettlebell swing, two to four sets is going to be just fine, because you're going to start getting a little tired after that. And that's-- I don't know, what would you say, 8 to 12 reps when you first starting to learn how to use it. No reason to overdo it. Form might break down after that a little bit. But again, when you get deeper and deeper into it, it depends on what your goals are from the kettlebell swing and how you would change up your set to rep ratio.

OK. Well, that seems like it's all of our questions. You are able to still, if you have questions later on, you can post them on the YouTube link correct? Is that how we're doing it? I can still answer questions later on. And if you are a member of Wellbeing Online, you can contact me straight through there. And you should be a member of well-being online.

Natalie writes stuff every single week for it. She writes a nutritional tip and a workout of the week. And actually every week, she writes an article review. What was your article review today?

NATALIE REEVES: Today was on--

RAMON SODANO: Behavior change?

NATALIE REEVES: Time management.

RAMON SODANO: Time management.

So what she does is, the Wellbeing has eight different parts of it. And she writes article reviews on different parts of well-being. We also have-- if you are a Global Campus student and you haven't heard of our Cyber Cougar Fitness Club program, this is a way to be able to get reimbursed through gym memberships. So if you send us a copy of your gym membership receipt, fill out a certain form that's on Cougsync, you can get reimbursed for up to \$100 for your gym membership. There's more about that on the Wellbeing Online web page. And again, you can always contact me about that.

So I think we're good. And thanks for showing up and calling me out my neutral neck position. I'll see you guys for Fitness Anywhere. Thanks.