

Hinge [VIDEO]

Traditional kettlebell skills use a hinge pattern. Everyone's hinge will look a little different, but there are certain characteristics of a good hinge pattern that should be applied for most people.

Stance

Everyone's stance will be a bit different but using this method is a good starting point for most people. You will be able to fit any size kettlebell through your legs using this width.

- Place your thumbs tip to tip. Then place your hands between your knees.
- Feet may point straight ahead or point out slightly.

Once you've established the width of your stance it's time to work on the hinge pattern itself. The above technique is known as the "Hand Sandwich" in Yoga circles and it works quite well for our kettlebell/hinge needs also.

Place your hands palm-up directly on your hip-flexor crease. Sit back with your hips keeping your shins nearly vertical while maintaining a straight or neutral spine. Your hips and lower abdomen should fold over your palms making a "hand sandwich."

Some clients and athletes may have a hard time sitting back with their hips. This simply may not be something they are used to in their activities of daily living. A good coaching cue to help them with this pattern is to place an object like a foam roller or a wooden dowel about 4-6 inches behind their hips while performing a hinge. This object is their target and it's placement is relative. You may have to start closer to their hips and as they get more proficient move the target further back. A wall or any vertical structure works well also.

One aspect that separates hinges from squats is the shin angle. On Hinges, the shin stays vertical or nearly vertical. At the most extreme angle during a hinge the knee may travel to the mid-foot but not beyond. This technique is known as the shin guard or shin block and it quickly clears up any tendency to squat during swings and other traditional kettlebell skills.

Place your hand one inch below the knee.

You can start with your hand about 1 inch away from your clients shin but as they get more comfortable move it in tighter. While you're there...keep an eye on their hips and check that they're move back and not down.

This technique is used to teach a neutral or straight spine. The dowel should make contact with 3 points...the back of the head, the T-spine and the lower-back/sacral area. Your client should not lose contact with these 3 points while they perform their hinges.

Notes:

Goat Belly

This is an excellent drill to coach your clients on how to hinge. Clients should go heavy for a few reasons:

- 1) Little-to-no risk of injury because where the load is
- 2) Provides optimal hamstring extension, they can bend over as far as they want and likely past where they usually hinge to
- 3) Clients have to brace, which is the same tension they should create with a regular deadlift
- 4) Holding the kettlebell into position builds scapular strength. Pinching and squeezing shoulder blades together strengthens those tiny muscles beneath. Strong scaps mean good posture, fewer injuries and heavier lifts

Extra cueing (see attached for a longer look at the demo):

Stand with your feet at shoulder width with three points of contact with your feet and the ground – front of heel, big toe and pinky toe. Slightly grip the floor with your toes but keep most of the weight just in front of the heel.

Take a big belly brace and grab a HEAVY kettlebell by it's horns and plant the bottom into your sternum.

Squeeze your shoulder blades together behind you as if you are trying to crack a walnut between them. Your elbows should be behind you – try to touch them together behind you.

Unlock your knees just slightly and begin to push your hips back as far as they will go. Once they stop moving backward (try to touch your glutes to the wall behind you) you are at your end range of motion.

When you reach your end range of motion, stand up by pushing the hips forward until they are completely extended, you are standing tall, and squeezing your glutes.

The Deadlift [VIDEO]

It's a great idea to keep your clients and athletes at the deadlift level for several weeks/months and in fact, we never really outgrow the deadlift, as it's something that we should work on consistently and with a mastery mindset.

Some tips to consider:

Head/neck position is a highly debated topic. I like to keep this simple and use a tip I learned from Pavel Tsatouline... "Look up without pinching your neck." That seems to work for just about everyone. Shin angle may change somewhat as we take the kettlebell from the floor, but remember, mid-foot is the limit for most people to maintain a nice hinge pattern. Looking from the side, the kettlebell should be hidden behind the ankle. Lats and shoulders should be active. Gray Cook uses the deadlift as an anti-protraction exercise. I love that. Use that imagery when deadlifting and it will work wonderfully.

Notes:

The Swing [VIDEO]

From this point on, I want you to think of your kettlebell skills as non-impact plyometrics. I actually use the term "power-metric" to describe fast kettlebell exercises. Think of the 2-arm and 1-arm kettlebell swings as weighted jumps or weighted jump training.

Swings and their variations share many of the same qualities as jumping and should be trained in the same fashion. We will break down each point on the upcoming pages. Please take a lot of notes. The Swing is the most important kettlebell exercise you could master.

Set-up

- Start with the kettlebell 10-12 inches out in front of you. This allows you to eccentrically load the hips and legs by actively hiking the kettlebell between your legs and behind your hips.
- Faster eccentric contractions lead to faster concentric contractions and this is an excellent way to ensure a fast eccentric loading.
- Tip the kettlebell back slightly and align the handle with your wrist.

Notes:

Hike

From the set-up position hike the kettlebell well behind your hips using strong shoulder action. Think of a straight-arm pulldown. Really engage the lats and upper back.

Wrist should be high up on your inner thigh. There's a crude coaching cue that floats around once in a while..."Put your thumb in your bum..." I learned in a Kettlebell course years ago

This position should share the same mechanics as the hinge you created using the dowel and other coaching cues. Shins remain vertical and back neutral.

Notes:

Up-Swing

The top position of the swing is very important. You should be looking for several aspects: Hips and knees should be fully extended. There is no need to "snap" either into full extension but glutes and quads should be fully contracted.

Elbows are soft but upper arms do leave the torso.

Bottom of the kettlebell should point forward...not down at the top of the swing.

If the kettlebell points down at the top, it's usually a clear sign that your client is not using their hips but rather their shoulders and upper back to elevate the kettlebell.

Shoulders should remain relatively down and back. No protraction, remember the what Gray Cook considers the deadlift to be? Same thing applies for the swing.

Hiking the kettlebell well behind the hips is one of the most important elements of the swing. It's in this position that we get that stretch-reflex, eccentric loading that we're looking to get out of this movement. This drill is a great cue for getting your clients and athletes to reach the proper height and distance behind their hips with the kettlebell.

Notes:

1-Arm Swing [VIDEO]

The set-up is mostly the same for the 1-arm swing but we must make some changes since we're working on one arm and we have a bit more freedom to express our power and athleticism.

Kettlebell starts 10-12 inches out in front.

There are 2 variations I want you to try out. One will resonate with you more than the other. I suggest you try out both variations with your clients as well. One has your thumb pointed forward, the other backward. There are benefits to both.

Your thumb remains forward as you hike the kettlebell behind your hips. It remains forward on the up-swing as well. Your elbow and forearm make contact and rest on your pelvis during the hike-back. Your elbow does not free float below your pelvis. Hyperextending your elbow is very probable if you allow your elbow to free float below your pelvis.

The other variation of the 1-arm swing has you pointing your thumb backwards the entire time, from the set-up all the way through the entire movement. This option is usually safest for the elbow but it does lead to more protraction of the shoulder...something that we try to coach out of the swing remember? If you choose this variation, you may come out of internal rotation on the up-swing but let it happen naturally.

Regardless of which option you choose for the 1-arm swing, one element that cannot be stressed enough is the action of the "nonworking arm." This arm provides up to 20-30% greater hip extension. Here's where I really want you to think of your swing training as a weighted jump. If I asked you to perform a vertical jump or broad jump the very first thing you would do is swing your arms down and back to load your hips and legs. The same technique applies here as well. This arm action is present in sprinting as well. On the up-swing, the non-working arm can follow the active arm. Some people actually prefer to touch the kettlebell at the top also.

Notes:

Clean [VIDEO]

The kettlebell clean is considered the "gateway" kettlebell exercise simply because it opens the doors to so many movement options. Once you master the kettlebell clean and the "Rack Position" which is also essential you move into lunges, step-ups, weighted carries ...

I like to teach the clean from the floor first. There are other options but this seems to work best for most people and clients. Start by placing the kettlebell between your feet. Again, as with the 1-arm swing you can choose to go with thumb forward or thumb back. Please try both out. Neither is wrong. Regardless of which variation you choose, always favor the horn closest your thumb. Please notice the "non-working" arm loading the hips.

The kettlebell revolves "around" your wrist on a properly performed clean. Not up and over. Although that variation does exist it's quite harder to learn and can bruise your wrist easily. Notice the final position in the clean, this is known as the "Rack Position."

In the Rack Position your elbows stay tight and your forearm angles in. The degree of that angle is an individual preference but it's used to counterbalance the kettlebell's center of gravity. Wrist is always neutral or straight. Hips & knees should in be full extension at top.

Notes:

Clean & Press [VIDEO]

Once you have the clean down you can move into another classic. From a beautiful rack position simply press overhead. Upper arm along side the ear. Wrist is straight. Elbow should be in full extension. The press portion of this move is a bit unique. It resembles an "Arnold Press." The bell doesn't travel straight up and down but rather in a, beautiful arc from rack to overhead. Please note, it is one smooth movement, not two disconnected movements.

Notes:

Goblet Squat [VIDEO]

The Goblet squat is a wonderful way to introduce the kettlebell to your client. It's also an excellent exercise for teaching the squat pattern in general. There are several ways to hold the kettlebell in the Goblet Squat. We'll highlight a few here along with some performance tips. Regardless of the variation you choose the elbows always travel inside the knee. Hip crease is below knee crease. Weight on heels.

You can see in the photo how the shin angle between a squat and a hinge are much different.

Knees can track out over toes and a well performed squat.

Play around with the depth by using a hip pry and using your elbows as a fulcrum to open up your adductors and hips.

Notes:

Weighted Carries [VIDEO]

- They can help improve your posture by strengthening your upper back and teaching you to lock the shoulders down. The core muscles also have to work to keep you upright and resist against the weight.

- They can help to improve hip strength and stability. Each step you take you have to support the load primarily on one leg. This is especially beneficial if you don't include much single leg work in your training.
- They can help you learn to brace the torso and stay tight while moving a heavy load.
- Overhead variations can build a lot of shoulder stability and translate well to improved strength in other overhead movements.
- They can help build foot strength and stability if performed without shoes. A more stable foot means a more stable foundation to squat or pull from.
- They're simple and don't take much technique work to see benefits.

Having your client perform weight carries like the traditional "Farmer's Walk" is also an excellent way to introduce the kettlebell into their program. We use several carry positions. Each have their own value. You can even mix these different positions creating "Mixed Carries." For example, having one bell in the Rack Position and the other overhead or along your side. Try out other exercise from these carries also like step-ups, lunges and their variations etc...

Notes: