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## JOURNAL ARTICLES

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### **Kettlebells**

#### One-Arm Swings and Beyond

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In the last two issues, I discussed the mechanics and fundamental movements of the two-arm kettlebell swing. Through proper, regular practice, your swing should now be more efficient, consistent, and powerful. Now it's time to move to the next progression: the one-arm swing.

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## Kettlebells: One-Arm Swings and Beyond (continued...)

Performing the kettlebell swing with one arm at a time makes it a more demanding exercise, even though the technique is the same as for the two-arm swing. You will quickly notice increased demands on your grip strength and stamina as well as increased core activation. In addition, any previously undetected technical deficiencies will soon

become obvious. For these reasons, I highly recommend that you practice one-arm swings with a lighter kettlebell. If one is not available, then it is better to practice more sets with fewer repetitions in each. Strive to work as hard as possible, while staying as fresh as possible. Fatigue is counter-productive when learning new skills.

### Drill #1: One-arm deadlift

Warm up by performing 3 to 5 reps of the two-arm kettlebell deadlift. This will establish a baseline and reinforce good mechanics.

Using the same form, perform the one-arm deadlift for 3 to 5 reps on each side, making sure you conform to the following guidelines:

- Make a conscious effort to keep your upper body square from start to finish.
- Do not allow your non-working hand to touch any part of your body.
- Be sure to fully extend your knees and hips at the top of the lift.

It is prudent to master the mechanics of the one-arm deadlift before attempting the one-arm swing, since the typical form errors are the same for both moves. The key to both the one-arm deadlift and the one-arm swing is to keep your upper body square to the kettlebell's path of movement during the entire exercise. Likewise, keep your hips square and your back in alignment throughout the movement. Nothing good will come from allowing your upper body to twist.





## Drill #2: One-arm swing

1. Set the kettlebell on the ground, centered in front of your feet.
  2. Assume a good deadlift setup stance: head up, chest open, butt back, and weight on your heels. Grasp the KB with one hand.
  3. Simultaneously extend your legs and pull (i.e., hike) the kettlebell up and back between your legs. (Don't worry if the bottom of the KB initially drags on the ground. It will soon be airborne.)
  4. Once the kettlebell reaches the end of its arc, explosively extend your knees and hips. Your goal is to project the kettlebell to chest or eye level. Don't worry if it takes a few reps to get it there—that's normal.
  5. Perform 5 to 10 reps, and then place the kettlebell on the ground. Resist the temptation to round your back when placing it on the floor. Instead, jackknife at the hips to sit back, keep your back straight at all times.
  6. Switch hands and then repeat the sequence for another 5 to 10 reps.
- Problem #2:** The kettlebell does not project high enough.
- Solutions:
1. Practice standing vertical jumps between sets.
  2. Use a lighter kettlebell.
  3. Contract your core harder
  4. Employ proper breathing.
- Problem #3:** The kettlebell feels like it will slip out my hand.
- Solutions:
1. Shorter sets performed more frequently will increase grip strength rapidly.
  2. Change hands more frequently via the "half-rotation switch" or hand-to-hand swings (see below).
  3. Use a lighter KB.

### Troubleshooting the one-arm swing

**Problem #1:** The shoulders do not remain square.

Solutions:

1. Keep your chest open and your shoulders back and down.



### Drill #3: The half-rotation switch

The half-rotation switch is the easiest way to transfer the kettlebell from one hand to the other without stopping to put it down. This technique allows for continuous motion, which translates to increased work capacity. It also maximizes safety because you are transferring the KB from hand to hand when your spine is in a neutral position. And it reduces the likelihood of grip failure because it makes it nearly effortless to switch from one hand to the other when one is fatigued.

To perform a half-rotation switch:

1. As the kettlebell is moving to the top of its arc, rotate your hand palm up.
2. Simultaneously move your free hand up to the path of bell with the palm down.
3. Grasp the kettlebell with the free hand, release it with the other, and continue the motion.



Timing is key in the half-rotation switch. Switch the kettlebell from hand to hand when it is at the top end of the swing. The half-rotation switch is the method of choice for performing one-arm swings indoors.

### Drill #4: Swing release (two hands)

The two-hand swing release is a foundational, yet demanding, exercise for “H2H” (hand-to-hand, or release) kettlebell work. This drill is not only fun and challenging, but also a necessary step to properly prepare you for the H2H swing (i.e., the one-arm version).

It is best to practice the H2H swing in an area where you can freely drop the kettlebell without worrying about causing property damage. After practicing the techniques, you may feel confident for indoor training. Practice for success by staying as fresh as possible by keeping your reps low. In the beginning, it's a good idea to sandwich 1 to 2 swings between each release to help reset and maintain good form. Fatigue and sloppy form should be avoided at all costs. Remember: Skill first!

To perform the two-hand swing release:

1. Begin by performing a regular two-arm swing.
2. When the kettlebell reaches chest height,



purposefully “drag” the fingers of both hands up and off the handle at a 45-degree angle.

3. Allow the kettlebell to rise to its highest position. The handle should remain horizontal and parallel to the ground while the kettlebell is airborne.
4. Grab the handle with both hands and resume the swing.



### Drill #4: Swing release (two hands) (continued...)

Troubleshooting the swing release moves

*Problem #1: The kettlebell flips over.*

**Solution:** At the top of the swing, pull the kettlebell handle slightly up and toward you. This action is very important. It will prevent the kettlebell from flipping and will keep the kettlebell within arms reach.

*Problem #2: The kettlebell handle rotates clockwise/counter clockwise.*

**Solution:** Make a conscious effort to release both hands at the same time. If one releases before the other, the handle will rotate. The handle must stay parallel to the floor.

*Problem #3: The kettlebell drifts away from you.*

**Solution:** Move your arms similar to a “high-pull” motion, with a slight arm bend, allowing your fingers to drag off the handle. Never reach for a kettlebell that is out of arm’s reach. It is better to let it fall to the floor than to attempt to grab it and have it pull you forward, out of position, possibly resulting in an injury.

*Problem #4: The kettlebell moves too close to your face.*

**Solution:** Release your fingers off the KB sooner or use less force in the “high-pull” motion.

### Drill #5: H2H swing (a.k.a. DARC swing)

The “H2H” swing is a more versatile and demanding way to alternate the kettlebell from one hand to the other. The switch takes place at the highest part of the swing. This is where the KB momentarily becomes weightless. This exercise will really challenge your core and grip strength in a unique way. It will also improve your hand-to-eye coordination and hand speed.

To perform the H2H swing release:

1. Follow the technique for the one-arm swing.
2. When the KB reaches chest height, “drag” your fingers off the kettlebell (i.e., slightly pull it up and backwards at a 45-degree angle).
3. Keep your eye on the kettlebell and immediately grasp the handle with your free hand.
4. Resume the one-arm swing, now holding the kettlebell with your other hand. Never compromise form. If at any time you feel like your form may be compromised, immediately release the kettlebell and let it safely drop to the ground.



**Note:** Be realistic. You will drop the kettlebell. Get used to it. It’s not a big deal. It is far better to drop a kettlebell than to grab a poorly released, out of reach kettlebell. If the kettlebell gets too close to your face or body, simply push it away and step back. If the kettlebell moves too far away, watch it hit the floor. If the kettlebell handle twists, don’t try to grab it.

If you choose to practice H2H drills, then there are two H2H mottos I recommend you commit to memory and live by:

- Quick feet are happy feet.
- If you’re gonna be stupid, you’d better be tough.