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CrossFit
JOURNAL ARTICLES

Turkish Get-Up: Part I

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The Turkish get-up (TGU) is an outstanding exercise that develops strength, flexibility, and stability throughout the entire body. It has especially proven itself as an excellent prehabilitation and rehabilitation exercise for the shoulders. In addition, a mastered TGU will make all overhead exercises safer and easier.

Historically, the TGU was a staple exercise for old-time strongmen and wrestlers. It's been said that in the days of old, this was the first and only exercise taught to many aspiring weightlifters to practice. Supposedly, no other exercises were taught or practiced until the pupil could perform the TGU with a 100-pound weight in either hand. At first, I thought this might have been just weightlifting folklore. However, I decided to make the 100-pound TGU a personal goal. After reaching this goal, I quickly realized the wisdom behind the methodology. First, it takes tenacity and commitment to conquer this feat of strength. Second, it slowly yet steadily builds a solid foundation of strength that nearly "injury proofs" the body,

1 of 5

Turkish Get-Up: Part I (continued...)

making it ready for more demanding training. Third, it significantly strengthens the major muscle groups, small stabilizing muscles, and connective tissues.

I first learned the TGU in December of 2001. At that time I was facing the grim option of having a third surgery on my right shoulder. I've had a long history of shoulder subluxations/dislocations. I have had two surgeries on my right shoulder (1985 and 1987) and one on my left (1989). Unfortunately, even after the two surgeries, my right shoulder would continue to dislocate a couple of times a year; sometimes while training, many times while sleeping. Talk about a rude awakening!

Over this 15-year period, I diligently practiced every rubber band exercise and rotator cuff program known

in the realm of physical therapy, but to no relief. In December 2001, I started practicing the TGU with dumbbells. (Kettlebells weren't available at that time.) I practiced this exercise with dumbbells, then later with kettlebells. Ultimately, I fabricated two homemade 110-pound kettlebells, and by spring of 2002 I was performing singles with them with either hand, reaching my goal.

Knowing what I know now, I'm thoroughly convinced that I could have avoided all three surgeries had I only known this valuable exercise. My shoulders are more stable and stronger now than ever before. The range of motion is completely restored. Best of all, I have not suffered a shoulder subluxation or complete dislocation in over six years.

The arm-bar stretch

The "arm bar stretch" is a simple but effective way to strengthen the stabilizer muscles in the shoulder and actively stretch the pectoral muscles. It builds strength at extreme ranges of motion and can be practiced as a standalone exercise or in conjunction with the TGU.

Begin with a light kettlebell or dumbbell. I prefer the kettlebell because of the way it rests on the back of the forearm. The offset weight has a tendency to pull your arm backward. Resisting that tendency and controlling the weight overhead simultaneously strengthens and stretches all the muscles in and around the shoulder girdle. Start with a light kettlebell until you have the movement mastered and are confident in your strength and ability to support increased loads.

1. Begin by lying on the floor, in a supine position (i.e., face up), with the kettlebell on your right. Lean toward the kettlebell, grasping the handle with your right hand, keeping your right elbow tight to your side. The left hand comes over the top to provide an assist (photo 1). Slowly roll back to the supine position, bringing the kettlebell with you. Your forearm should be perpendicular to the floor (photo 2). Get into the habit of always using two hands to pick up or put down the kettlebell when you are on the ground. This will protect your rotator cuff from potential injury.



The arm-bar stretch: The transition (continued...)

2. Press the kettlebell up in front of your chest to arm's length. If necessary, use your left arm to assist the lift or spot the weight. The goal is to get the kettlebell to the locked-out position. The purpose of this exercise is not to build a big chest through pressing. Once the elbow is straight, adjust the kettlebell to where it sits deep across the heel of your palm to take strain off your wrist (photo 3).
3. Post your right foot flat on the ground, with your heel close to your buttocks (on the same side foot as your working arm) (photo 4). This is the starting position for this stretch. Be sure to keep your eyes on the kettlebell throughout the entire exercise
4. Push off your posted foot, slowly rolling over to your left side. Reposition your left arm so you can rest the side of your head onto your biceps (photo 5). Continue carefully rolling over, keeping your arm vertical, until you are nearly prone (photo 6) or until you hit a sticking point. Hold that position for a few seconds and then return to the starting position.
5. Repeat for three to five reps; then switch arms.



Tips

- Keep your reps low (i.e., three to five). Train as heavy as possible but stay as fresh as possible.
- If for some reason you get distracted and begin to lose control or balance of the kettlebell, avoid the temptation to try to save it. Rotate your torso quickly in the direction the kettlebell wants to go and guide it into a controlled crash on the floor. Don't try to save it. The kettlebell will always win.

The tactical Turkish get-up

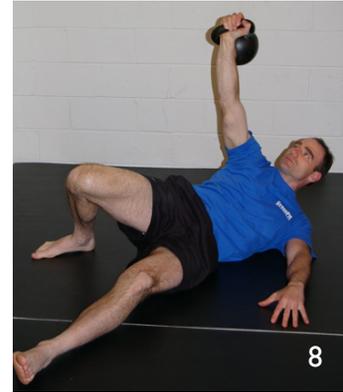
There are many ways to perform the TGU. The first variation I will share with you is the one that's simple, easy to learn, and has tremendous carryover to any sport or profession. It's called the tactical TGU because it mimics the tactical way of getting back to your feet

if you were knocked down during a fight. This skill is even more important when you find yourself in full kit and level-IV body armor.

To keep it simple, I will teach the tactical TGU in three parts: the sit-up, the transition, and the stand-up.

TGU: The sit-up

1. Begin by following the first two steps of the “Arm Bar” stretch to get into a position flat on your back, with the kettlebell extended straight up in front of your chest and your arm locked out (photos 1-3).
2. From the starting position, with your left hand flat on the ground, roll slightly to your left side and sit up (photos 7-10). In other words, allow the weight to drift just slightly forward, then push off your posted foot to help you sit up. It is acceptable to allow your free arm to assist slightly against the floor in sitting up. Finish with the right arm and the kettlebell vertical and your eyes on the bell.



TGU: The transition

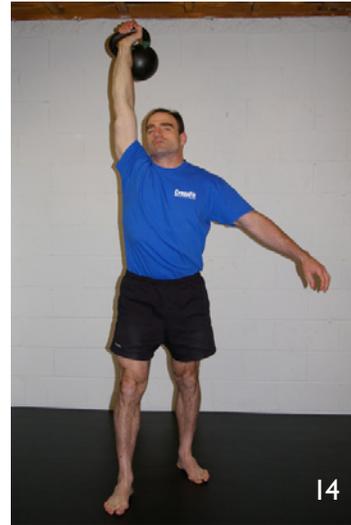
The transition will move you from the sitting to the kneeling position.

3. Begin by pressing the shoulder of your support hand (the hand that is on the ground) away from your ear. This is an important but often overlooked step. It puts your shoulder in a strong position. It keeps the shoulder “active,” as when you are performing dips on parallel bars.
4. Simultaneously press off your hand and your posted foot, lifting your hips off the floor. This will create the space necessary to bring your left leg underneath you (photo 11) as you slowly move into a three-point kneeling position (photo 12).



TGU: The stand-up

5. Slowly straighten your torso and pull your left arm up off the ground so that you are in a two-point kneeling position (photo 13). Keep your eyes on the kettlebell, and actively press the kettlebell straight up toward the ceiling throughout this step.
6. Keeping your right shin vertical, load your weight onto your heel, contract your outside glute and stand up, pushing the kettlebell up overhead as you rise (photo 14). Congratulations! You just successfully completed the first half of the tactical TGU.
7. Pause for a moment, gather your thoughts and breath, and then carefully reverse the steps to lower yourself to the floor and back into the starting position, flat on the ground with the kettlebell extended over your chest. Watch the kettlebell and actively drive it upward with your shoulder even as you descend back into a supine position.



Tips

- Stay tight, move slowly, keep your elbow locked, and remain focused on the kettlebell. This is especially important when transitioning from standing to kneeling, kneeling to sitting, and sitting to supine. The combination of a bent elbow, a little momentum, and the sudden jolt could cause the kettlebell to come crashing down. Take your time, and be smooth.
- Keep your reps low—three to five with moderate weight, say, or singles with heavy weight. This exercise is best practiced in parts or with a spotter until all the motions are mastered.
- My favorite way to practice the tactical TGU, especially when I'm short on time, is to set a timer for 10 minutes and perform singles (i.e., one rep consists of one up and one down), alternating sides after every rep. I've found this to be a safe and productive way to train tactical TGUs.

Mastering the TGU is an excellent investment of your time and effort. My personal success story has been repeated many times with the clients I train. Boxers, grapplers, no-holds-barred fighters, police officers, military personnel, and the average “Joe” or “Jane” all have reaped the benefits of the TGU. Whether you have a history of shoulder problems or are trying to prevent them, please heed my advice: Just say “No” to the bench press and “Hello” to the TGU.

In next month's issue I will cover some fun and challenging TGU variations.



Jeff Martone, owner of [Tactical Athlete Training Systems](http://www.tacticalathlete.com), was one of the first certified senior kettlebell instructors in the United States. He is best known as the creator of “hand-2-hand” kettlebell juggling, SHOT training, and the T.A.P.S. pull-up system. He is also the author of six training DVDs. He was the first to implement kettlebell training in a federal law enforcement agency and now offers instructor-level certifications. He has over 15 years of experience as a full-time defensive tactics, firearms, and special-response-team instructor.