

# Kettlebell Complexes, Chains, Layers and Ladders

Is your training regime preventing you from getting ripped? If so, spruce it up with some metabolic kettlebell conditioning. Kettlebells are superior when it comes to putting on muscle mass while simultaneously conditioning your metabolic system. Kettlebell training allows smooth transitions from one exercise to the next, allowing full body movements to be trained while keeping the heart rate high, without the accumulation of lactic acid in specific muscles. This article will explain specific methods you can use when designing kettlebell workouts, such as the push/pull method, compound set training, and kettlebell complexes and ladders. We will discuss each method here and provide examples.

## PUSH/PULL SETS

One method of organizing your workouts is alternating between push & pull exercises. This is similar to super-setting when lifting weights, but when using kettlebells, training 'movements' over targeting individual muscles is stressed. Most of the kettlebell exercises can be broken down into pushing movements or pulling movements. Following the push/pull method ensures that the same muscle group will not be used in two back-to-back exercises, which eliminates fatigue in the involved muscles groups and allows one to put more work into less amount of time. Examples of pull exercises are the deadlift, swing, clean, high pull and snatch. Push exercises are the front squat, lunge, press, Turkish Get Up. Below is an example of a push/pull exercise routine.

Push/Pull Kettlebell Routine					
Exercise Order*	Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Weight
1.a	KB Swing	10	5	30 seconds	16-32 kg
1.b	Front Squat	10			
2.a	KB Snatch	5 e/arm	3-5	30 Seconds	16-24 kg
2.b	KB Press	5 e/arm			

\*a. and b. means that exercises are performed one after another

## COMPOUND MOVEMENT SETS

Similar to the push/pull method, we can also perform compound sets. A compound movement set is when you perform two different exercises of the same movement (a pull followed by another pull) back to back. For example, 10 reps of kettlebell snatches on the left arm, followed by 10 reps of kettlebell cleans on the left arm, then 10 single

arm swings on the left arm. All three exercises must be completed before moving on to the right arm. Beginners can rest between arms if necessary. In kettlebell training, a general rule of thumb is to always start an exercise with your non-dominant side; this will balance things out as you will get focus on your weak side first.

<b>Compound Movement Kettlebell Routine</b>					
<b>Exercise Order*</b>	<b>Exercise</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Sets</b>	<b>Rest</b>	<b>Weight</b>
1.a	Snatch Left	10	3-5	2 minutes between sets	8-24 kg
1.b	Clean Left	10			
1.c	Single Arm Swing Left	10			

\*repeat on right side

### **KETTLEBELL COMPLEXES**

Kettlebell complexes involve cycling through a series of exercises without putting the kettlebell(s) down, performing all the reps of one exercise before moving on to the next. Once you make it through all of the required exercises and reps for each exercise, then you have completed one complex, which is equivalent to one set. Rest between complexes and repeat for the desired amount of complexes, usually 3-5 is more than enough. Complexes are a great way for getting in a lot of work in a minimal amount of time, and boosting the work capacity of the cardiovascular system while also building endurance, strength & power. Notice in the below example how the exercises are organized in the push/pull method. They can also be organized in the compound movement set method.

<b>Kettlebell Complex Example</b>					
<b>Exercise #</b>	<b>Exercise</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Sets</b>	<b>Rest</b>	<b>Weight</b>
1	KB Snatch	5 e/ arm	3 -5	3-5 minutes between complexes*	8-16 kg
2	Front Squat	10			
3	Clean	5 e/arm			
4	Press	5 e/arm			
5	Swing	10			

\* no rest between exercises

## KETTLEBELL CHAINS

A kettlebell chain is a series of exercises performed sequentially, but the difference from a complex is that you perform only one rep of each exercise in the sequence before starting the sequence over again. Each time the sequence of exercises is performed, it counts as one rep.

Example of a Kettlebell Chain

- Kettlebell SA Swing x 1
- Kettlebell Clean x 1
- Kettlebell Front Squat x 1
- Kettlebell Press x 1
- Repeat on opposite arm

Kettlebell Chain					
Exercise #	Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Weight
1.a	KB Snatch	1 rep of each exercise equals 1 complete 'chain' rep	3-5	1-3 minutes between chain sets	8-24 kg
1.b	Swing				
1.c	Clean				
1.d	Squat				
1.e	Press		Complete 5 'chain' reps for 1 complete set		

## KETTLEBELL CHAIN LAYERS

A kettlebell chain layer is when each time you go through one kettlebell 'chain' set, you add another exercise (layer) at the end of the chain on subsequent 'chain' sets. For example, in the above chain example, in the first set/chain you would complete a snatch and a swing. In the second set/chain you would complete a snatch, swing, then add a clean. In the third set/chain you would add the squat at the end of the chain and finally add the press at the end of the last chain. This would be completed with no rest between chains and would be considered one complete set.

Kettlebell Chain Layer					
Exercise #	Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Weight
Layer 1	Snatch, Swing	1 rep of each exercise equals 1 complete 'chain'.	3-5	1-3 minutes between chain sets	8-24 kg
Layer 2	Snatch, swing, clean				
Layer 3	Snatch, swing, clean		Completing all 4 layers is considered one set/chain layer		

Layer 4	squat				
	Snatch, swing, clean, squat press				

### KETTLEBELL LADDERS

Kettlebell ladders can take multiple forms, from 'rep' ladders, to 'weight' ladders to 'timed' ladders, however the concept remains the same; multiple sets of an exercise where one variable (reps, weight, time) gets progressively harder. 'Ladders' start out easy and builds to an almost all-out effort, then backs off and starts all over again. Strength is an obvious benefit of ladders when using the grinds. For example, a kettlebell press ladder of 5 sets of 1,2,3 reps totals to 30 total reps each arm. The low rep ranges allow for perfect execution, developing strength and technique development. If you were to perform 30 straight reps, technique would ultimately breakdown; as quality is always comprised for quantity. Ladders prevent this. Choose a weight that you can press 6-8 times maximum. Start out with ladders from 1 to 3 reps with 3 sets and add a 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> rep overtime. When you can do 5 sets of (1,2,3,4,5), then you can move up in weight. When working with ballistic movements such as the snatch or swing, reps can be wider, for example 5 sets of (5,10,15,20) swings. The recommended rest within the set between reps is a 1:1 ratio, when working for strength, take about 3 minutes between sets.

#### ***Kettlebell Rep Ladder***

Press a kettlebell 1 time each arm. Then 2 time each arm than 3 times etc... all the way up to 5 reps, rest and then repeat starting back at 1 rep and work back up. This is equal to 5 x (1,2,3,4,5). Each time you go through one ladder (up to 5), this is referred to as one set, or a 'rung'. Therefore, to go from 1 to 5 five times means you completed 5 rungs of a 1 to 5 ladder.

Repetition Ladder					
Exercise Order	Exercise	Reps	Sets/rungs	Rest	Weight
1	Kettlebell Press	1,2,3,4,5	3-5	3 minutes between sets	6-8 Rep Max
2	Kettlebell Swing	5,10,15,20	3-5	3 minutes between sets	12-24 kg

### ***Kettlebell Weight Ladder***

In a '**weight ladder**', the reps stay the same while the weight climbs. An example using the kettlebell press one presses a 12 kg kettlebell x 5 with left arm, followed immediately with their right arm, then repeated with a 16 kg kettlebell x5 both arms, followed by a 20 kg kettlebell x 5 for both arms. Then back down to 12 kg after a short rest.

<b>'Weight Ladder'</b>					
<b>Exercise Order</b>	<b>Exercise</b>	<b>Reps</b>	<b>Sets/rungs</b>	<b>Rest</b>	<b>Weight</b>
1	Kettlebell Press	5 @ 12 kg 5 @ 16 kg 5 @ 20 kg	3-5	3 minutes between sets	12,16,20 kg
2	Kettlebell Swing	10 @ 16 kg 10 @ 24 kg 10 @ 32 kg	3-5	3 minutes between sets	16,24,32 kg

### ***Kettlebell Time Ladders***

'Timed Ladders' imply the same concept, however repetitions are better off not counted as the reps will automatically increase with the increase in time. This method is great in a group setting, as it allows every student to go at their own abilities.

<b>Kettlebell Press 'Time Ladder'</b>					
<b>Exercise Order</b>	<b>Exercise</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Sets/rungs</b>	<b>Rest</b>	<b>Weight</b>
1	Kettlebell Swing	10,15,20,25,30 seconds	3-5	3 minutes between sets	8-24 kg
2	Front Squat	10,15,20,25,30 seconds	3-5	3 minutes between sets	8-24 kg

When using ladders, working in partners works best, as the partners will work in a 'you go, I go' fashion, a 1:1 work/rest ratio. If you have a group of beginners or deconditioned individuals, groups of three work well, increasing the time between ladder reps to a 1:2 work/rest ratio. Finally, as rest between ladder sets/rungs is recommended, you can combine two ladders in a back to back, combining a push exercise with a pull exercise, or an upper body and a lower body exercise. For example, when completing one set/rung of a kettlebell press ladder, you can immediately go into a set/rung of a swing ladder, and then immediately back into the second set/rung of the press ladder. This method is great in a group setting or when time is limited, as extended rest periods causes unnecessary socializing amongst class members, leading to distraction and focus. This way you can keep yourself and group members continuously moving.

For example, complete 1 set of 1,2,3,4,5 presses, then 1 set of 10,15,20,25,30 swings, and repeat for set two of each exercise, without resting between sets. The upper body, or 'push' muscles of the shoulder are resting while the lower body 'pull' exercise muscles are working and vice versa.

In conclusion, if your exercise programming is not doing what it is supposed to do, which is get your ripped and put on muscle, try training with kettlebells using the push/pull sets, compound sets, complexes, chains, layers, and ladders.