

Mad Scientist Kettlebell Hacks



By Nick Nilsson

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Mad Scientist Kettlebell Hacks

By Nick Nilsson
The Mad Scientist of Muscle

I'm known as the "Mad Scientist of Muscle" for a reason...I don't train in a conventional way and I create exercises and programs that get results where normal training programs and movements fail.



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With that in mind, I've got a collection of some of my favorite unique kettlebell movements for you to try out. These exercises and workouts don't require a tremendous amount of technical skill to perform, making them accessible to just about anybody who wants to have some fun with kettlebell training and get some amazing results.

Enjoy!

Nick

One-Arm Kettlebell Swing to Goblet Squat



The Kettlebell Swing is a great exercise for the entire posterior chain (the muscles running down the back of the body)...one glaring weakness, however, is the lack of substantial quadricep involvement.

The Goblet Squat is a great exercise for the quads, core, and upper back...

So now we're going to combine BOTH exercises onto one movement, resulting in a fantastic exercise that hits basically your entire lower body and a good portion of your upper as well.

It's excellent for high rep/cardio-style training and for heavier, lower-rep training as well.

You'll need a kettlebell for this one. The first part of the exercise is a standard one-arm kettlebell swing.



Swing the kettlebell back.



Then snap the hips forward to get the kettlebell swinging forward and up.



As the kettlebell swings to the top, bring it in towards your chest and catch the "bell" part in your free hand, holding it in your palm.



Now do a goblet squat in that position.



Come back up, then move the kettlebell away from your body and swing it back down. Then repeat.

There are two versions of this exercise. In the first version, you separate each exercise into distinct phases. Swing the kettlebell up and catch it. Stop. Then squat down and come back up. Stop. Then swing the kettlebell back down and repeat.

You can also perform it as a smooth transition, swinging the kettlebell up and going directly into the squat the moment you catch it, come down then come back up and immediately start the downswing.







It's tough to describe in pictures, so I would HIGHLY recommend you watch the video of both methods in action.

This combination exercise works a MASSIVE amount of muscle mass, making it perfect for cardio training and very effective for building strength and power as well (when using heavier loads).

The goblet squat is a fantastic exercise for the anterior core (specifically the anti-flexion or "support" function), while the swing is one of the best exercises you can do for the lower back, making the combination of the two a perfect complement to each other.

You'll get a powerful near-total-body workout with this one.

Lateral Kettlebell Swings



The kettlebell swing is a fantastic exercise for developing power through your posterior chain (the muscles down the back of your body). There is no exercise that teaches and works the powerful "hip hinge" movement better than the kettlebell swing.

But the "normal" swing is not the only way to swing...

This version of the kettlebell swing is done with a lateral movement pattern, working your body in what is known in biomechanical terms as the "frontal plane" (or "coronal plane"). Imagine a piece of sheet metal dividing your body between front and back. That's the frontal plane.

The normal kettlebell swing is done in a sagittal plane (forward and back).

Working in the frontal plane using lateral movements is extremely important not only for athletes (there aren't many sports that doesn't require moving sideways at some point) but for anybody who wants to improve their basic balance and movement skills and core strength.

Just FYI, even though it may LOOK like a lateral raise, this is primarily a core and leg exercise, not a shoulder exercise.

How To Do It:

You'll need a light to moderate kettlebell to perform this exercise at first. You'll want to get comfortable with the movement pattern and allow your body time to develop the muscles needed to move in a direction it may not be used to.

This exercise requires strong core muscles with good anti-rotational strength. The momentum of the kettlebell will put a lot of rotational energy in through the core and those muscles have to be able to control it in order to stabilize the spine.

Lean forward a little with your arm hanging straight down in front of you.



The "working" side is the same side arm you're holding the kettlebell in (in this case, the right arm). Take a short backswing to get the weight moving.



Here's a side view so you can see how I'm leaning forward a little. This is critical...if you don't, you'll crack your knees with the kettlebell.



Shift your weight to the right to start the swing up to the right.





Swing it all the way up until your arm is horizontal.



Let the kettlebell swing back down to the backswing and repeat.



You'll notice that weight transfer is absolutely critical with this exercise, especially as you move up into heavier weights. If you don't properly shift your bodyweight to counterbalance the swing, you'll go flying.

When you've completed your reps with one arm, you can either set the kettlebell down and change hands or you can change hands during the movement (do this only if you're comfortable with it).

On the backswing, grip the handle with both hands. This is the moment where the kettlebell "weighs" the least, so it's easiest to change grip.



As you come back down, remove your right hand from the handle and keep going.



Again, note my body position...leaning forward a little with knee slightly bent and a nice arch in the lower back. The goal of this body position is stabilizing the spine, using the deep core muscles to deal with and transfer the force of the swinging, and to keep the kettlebell out in front of your knees.



Continue the swings as you did with the other hand.



Come up until your arm is horizontal.



The repeat the movement until you've completed your reps.

As you build up in weight with this exercise, proper weight transfer during the swing is going to become more and more important. This weight transfer will be something you will learn...either the easy way (by watching the video of me performing the exercise) or the hard way...

DO NOT perform this exercise to failure. These are the muscles that stabilize the during a movement that involves rotation. We don't want them to fail.

Aim for 6-8 swings on either side, keeping yourself within your capabilities. You can add weight as long as you can handle the movement safely.

Overall, this is an excellent exercise for developing the core muscles as well as balance and functionality doing lateral movements.

Kettlebell Diagonal Swing Walks



I'll tell you right up front...this exercise does NOT make you look cool...so if you're very concerned about appearances or doing something different than everybody else, then this exercise is probably not for you.

However, if you ARE an independent-minded person and you want to develop INCREDIBLE core strength (specifically anti-rotational core strength) along with a tighter waist, then you are going to LOVE this exercise.

It's also a fantastic exercise for any sort of sport that requires force transfer through the core (between upper and lower body)...in other words EVERY SINGLE SPORT ON THE PLANET.

I call it a Kettlebell Diagonal Swing Walk and it's basically exactly what it sounds like...you're going to walk while swinging a pair of kettlebells diagonally (almost like cross-country skiing).

Every single step you take forces your core to transfer and accommodate the competing forces of two opposite-swinging kettlebells.

When you're using lighter weights, this is not so bad...so as soon as you get accustomed to the movement, you're going to increase the weight until you experience a strong tightening through the core with every step. I'm using a pair of 53 lb kettlebells for this demo.

If you don't have kettlebells, you can also use a pair of dumbbells instead...the exercise will work just the same. The only things you'll need to be aware of are the size of the dumbbell heads and the path they swing in. It can make the exercise a bit more awkward as you don't want to hit yourself with a dumbbell during the swing. It's the reason I DO recommend kettlebells, if you have the option.

The key with this exercise is to swing the opposing arm forward to the leg you're stepping with, i.e. when you step forward with the right foot, you swing the left arm forward and vice versa.

This sounds simple but actually takes a bit of practice and coordination. If you end up swinging the same side as you step forward on, your balance will be off.

With your first step, take a very deliberate step forward with your right foot while swinging the left arm forward. The rest will flow from there.



Keep your knees slightly bent as you're walking...if your knees are straight, the swinging force will throw off your balance.



It's a going to be a slow, slightly halting type of walk in order to keep your steps in sync with the swings.

This is even more apparent as you get into heavier weights. Every step will need to be planted firmly on the floor to give your body a solid base upon which to resist that transferred force through the core. Without a firm base, your core won't be able to resist the momentum of the swing and your body will start to rotate (which defeats the whole anti-rotation goal of the exercise!).





When you've gone as far as you can in one direction, turn around and go back.





For distance, I did twice back and forth in my basement gym for each set. This was probably about 40 yards total.

This is an excellent "finishing" exercise for your core. I like to use it towards the end of a workout, so that fatigue doesn't adversely affect other exercises.

I HIGHLY recommend you watch the video for this exercise. Still pictures are good but you really need to see the movement in action in order to really understand how it's done and what it should look like.

Bottom line, this exercise may look kind of stupid but it's EXTREMELY powerful for developing anti-rotational core strength. Every single step puts massive torque through the abdominal area that those core muscles have to deal with.

If your goal is improved athletic performance, give it a try at least once...you'll feel it's potential for turning you into a coiled cobra, ready to strike...

Kettlebell Walking Scissor Lunges



This is a phenomenal conditioning exercise targeting your entire lower body. It uses very targeted explosive, "mild" plyometrics to involve multiple types of muscles fibers while doing a walking lunge pattern.

Because of that, this exercise is surprisingly tough and incredibly effective for metabolic conditioning.

I recommend using a pair of kettlebells versus dumbbells for one simple reason...handle height. You CAN use dumbbells, but you will end up leaning further forward to perform the exercise. If you don't have kettlebells, try it with dumbbells and see how it feels. It will still be very effective, though you may have to use a bit lighter weight.

This is essentially going to be a Walking Lunge exercise done with an explosive double leg switch at the bottom of every rep (you'll what I mean).

This is the mild plyometric I was talking about...you're going for a fast, rebounding switch with your legs. In that position, you'll have very little weight bearing down on you, making it a very safe movement for just about anybody.

As well, I found this exercise to actually be easier on the knees than a normal Walking Lunge because of the powerful engagement of the hamstrings and glutes coming out of the bottom position, right after the leg switch. That elastic rebound you get from the switch helps power you up out of the bottom without sending all the tension into the knee joint as normally happens with a regular Walking Lunge.

Here's what it looks like...(I'm using a pair of 53 lb kettlebells here).

Start in a standing position, holding the kettlebells beside you.



Step forward with your left leg into a lunge position.



Come all the way down until you set the kettlebells fully on the ground.



Now support your upper body on the handles while you explosively switch your legs back and forth.







When your feet hit the ground back in the original lunge position, don't pause...use that impact/rebound to power up out of the bottom.



Now step forward with your right leg and repeat.



You will likely end up leaning forward somewhat as you're doing this, depending on how far forward you decide to set the kettlebells down.



Switch twice again, explosively.





Then use the elastic force to power out of the bottom.



Repeat the sequence for the desired distance. I went up and down my gym floor, which is about 40 feet total, I think.

This exercise isn't designed as a muscle or strength builder...it's a great conditioning exercise targeting the entire lower body.

And it will get your heart-rate CRANKED.

2 Kettlebell 20-Minute Fat-Loss Circuit With Swings



If you've got limited equipment, limited space, and/or limited time but you want a GREAT fat-loss workout, you're going to love this one...and by love I mean hate.

You're going to do a circuit of 3 sets each of 5 kettlebell exercises, covering 5 of your major movement patterns (vertical explosive, upper body push, upper body pull, lunge and hip hinge). You'll be done with the entire workout in less than 20 minutes.

All you need is a pair of kettlebells (dumbbells could also work, if you don't have kettlebells) for this circuit. I used a pair of 24 kg (53 lb) kettlebells for this circuit and that was plenty.

Here's the fun part...instead of resting between sets, you're going to do 40 seconds of kettlebell swings using one of the bells that you're working with.

Seriously...NO rest.

All you get is however long it takes you to get into the next exercise.

Perform all 3 of the sets for each exercise before moving to the next exercise in the sequence. It's not going to be too hard at first, but as fatigue accumulates in your posterior chain (especially towards the end), it's going to be extremely challenging.

Exercise #1 - Kettlebell Snatches

The first exercise is an explosive movement.

If you're not comfortable with the snatch, you can instead do goblet push-presses with a single kettlebell (where you hold the sides of the handles with the bell in front of your chest, squat down a little, then blast upwards, pressing the bell above your head).

Otherwise, perform 4-5 reps on one arm, then immediately switch and perform another 4-5 reps on the other arm.





As soon as you're done, set the bell down briefly, then go right into...

"Between Sets" Exercise - Kettlebell Swings

Pick up one of the kettlebells and do swings for 40 seconds (I recommend using a timer). The weight should be light enough that you can pretty easily do swings with it for the entire time period.

This will change as you get deeper into the workout...fatigue in the spinal erectors will likely force you to take short 3-5 second breaks during the 40 seconds (this is totally fine).



Just come to about shoulder level with the swings. There's no need to come up any higher than that.



Remember, swings are a powerful hip hinge movement. The power comes from your hips, lower back and hamstrings, not the quads. Each rep should begin with a forward snap of the hips.

You'll be doing this exercise between EVERY SET of the workout, instead of rest. And remember, you'll be performing 3 sets of each exercise.

Exercise #2 - Push-Ups on the Bells

Set the kettlebells on the floor so that they're lying on their sides. The handles should be horizontal. Set your hands on the bells so your palms are wide open then perform push-ups on top of them. The elevation allows you go a bit deeper into the range of motion.



Perform almost as many reps as you can with this...don't push to failure. Stay a few reps short.

Exercise #3 - Two Kettlebell Set-Down Rows

Now, if you want to do non-stop rows with the kettlebells here, you can.

I did start like that and found that it was more effective to set them down on the floor at the bottom of each rep (like a Pendlay Row). The reason being, after all the swings, my grip and lower back were both suffering and I would severely limiting how many reps I could get if I tried to go straight through.

The setting down (however brief) gives you some respite and allows you to get more reps total.



Try not to use your lower back as you row the kettlebells up and get a good contraction in the back muscles.

Go for as many reps as you can, staying a little short of failure.

Exercise #4 - Reverse Lunges

Start in the top standing position, then take a big step back and come down into the lunge position. This version of the lunge is easier on the knees than a step-forward lunge.



Come back up, then immediately step back with the other leg.



And yes, it is proper form to be leaning forward slightly. This actually helps challenge the glutes on the front leg more.

At the bottom of every rep, you can set the kettlebells fully on the floor. Again, similar to the rows, this gives your lower back and your grip a slight reprieve from the continuous loading. It'll allow you to get more overall reps.

Repeat for 4-6 reps on each leg.

Exercise #5 - Kettlebell Stiff-Legged Deadlifts

This is different from the Romanian Deadlift in that you'll be setting the kettlebells fully on the ground at the bottom of each rep, allowing you to reset your lower back position and focus the loading on the hamstrings.

And truthfully, your lower back will be screaming at this point, and it won't be practical to try and do Romanian Deadlifts (which involve continuous tension on the lower back and hams).





Perform sets of 3-5 reps with this exercise, depending on how much fire is in your lower back at this point (it will be a lot).

Once you've finished 3 sets of this, you're done.

A 20-Minute Nightmare

This circuit seems pretty straightforward, but in practice it is BRUTAL. If you were doing just the exercises on their own, it would be tough...when you add 40 seconds of swings in between every exercise, it is incredibly hard.

When you're getting into the second half of the work (where the focus shifts to lower body), if you need to take short breaks in your swings, you can (I had to). Just set the kettlebell down for 3-5 seconds, without stopping the timer, then pick it up and keep going until your 40 seconds are up.

This is an extremely efficient fat-loss workout...it's equipment-efficient, space-efficient and time-efficient, all wrapped up into one powerful total-body-challenging package.

500 Swings Workout



The kettlebell swing is one of THE single best exercises you can do...period. And this is one of the SIMPLEST workouts you can do with the swing.

Just because it's simple, don't think for a second that it's going to be easy. When you drill down to just one exercise like this, it makes for a VERY challenging workout...the same muscles get hit over and over again with no real break.

This workout is going to build serious power-endurance (i.e. the ability to keep generating power even while fatigued). It's also incredible for cranking up your metabolism for fat loss.

You're going to take one kettlebell (ideally) or dumbbell and do 500 swings, structured in blocks of a set number of reps.

For the demo, I'm using a dumbbell with a KettleClamp handle attached, which converts the dumbbell into a kettlebell analog. [You can read my full review of KettleClamps here](#) (GREAT piece of equipment - I use mine all the time).

I'm not going to go into a full description of how to do a kettlebell swing here...because honestly, if you don't know how to do one, you shouldn't be doing this workout.

Just remember, the key to the swing is in the hips...it's not an arm-swing movement...it's a powerful hip snap. Your arms are just serving to transfer the force from your hips through your upper body, to the weight.

It's also not a squat swing (another common mistake)...the knees should only be slightly bent at the bottom of the swing, as you can see in the first picture.



I recommend only swinging up to about shoulder height. A full overhead swing isn't necessary or recommended (the overhead position with the hands and arms close in like that can be tough on the shoulder joint, especially for a very high volume workout like this).



In terms of rep blocks, my preferred format is to do 10 swings, take 20 seconds rest, then repeat, performing sets of 10 swings until you've finished 500 reps. Going in blocks of 10 makes it easier to count and keep track of your reps.

I use a simple magnetic kitchen timer for my timing. I just set the timer to 40 minutes then start it counting down. At the end of each block of 10 reps, I note what the timer says then subtract 20 seconds from it. That's when I start the next block of reps.

There are several ways you can approach this one in terms of how much weight to use. For example, you can use a lighter weight and go for blocks of higher reps (like 20-50 reps per block). Or you can also go a bit heavier (5 reps) and take longer rest periods (e.g. 30 seconds).

Keep the rest periods consistent in between blocks of reps, e.g. always stick to 20 seconds rest or (if you're using lighter weight, 10 seconds rest, heavier, 30 seconds rest). This allows your body to form a groove with the exercise during the workout.

Either approach in terms of reps and weight works great. The goal here is not to push yourself to failure on each block of reps but just to do a lot of work by managing fatigue for a long period of time.

You CAN choose to do another number...100, 200, 400, 1000, whatever you like...500 is just the number I went for. It ended up taking me about 32 minutes to complete.

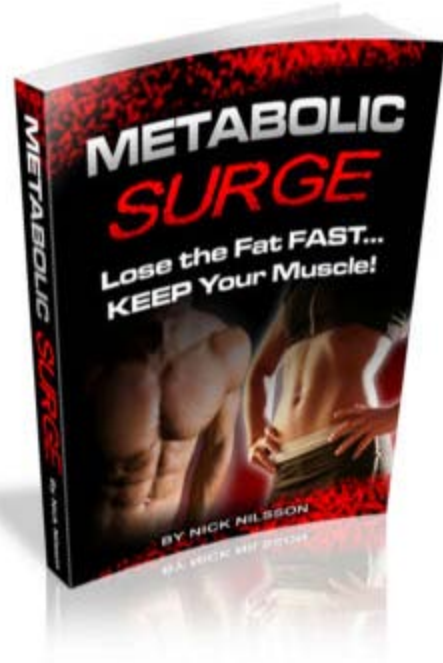
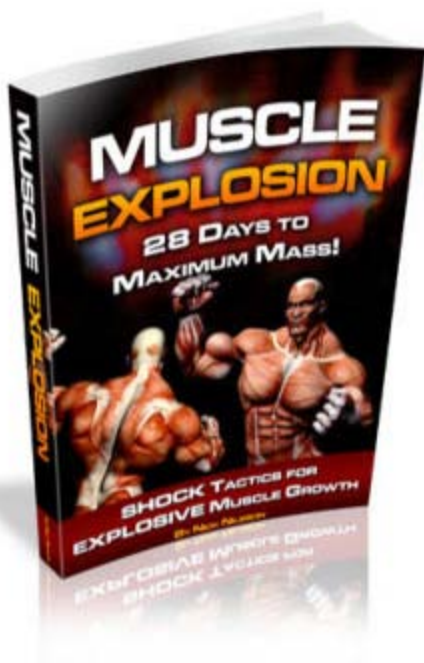
The real key with this workout is to focus on consistency of form. Your 500th rep should look almost exactly like your first rep. It will be tougher and probably hurt a lot more, but it should LOOK pretty much the same. This ensures you're practicing and reinforcing quality form for the exercise.

Next time you want to try a simple yet challenging workout, grab a kettlebell and get ready to WORK.

If you're interested in more training like this, check out

[Muscle Explosion - 28 Days to Maximum Mass](#)

[Metabolic Surge - Rapid Fat Loss](#)



[The Best Exercises You've Never Heard Of](#)

