

Kettlebells and Chiropractic — A Winning Combination!

By Wendy M. Schauer, D.C., R.K.C.,

After 14 years as a successful chiropractor I have finally discovered what I believe to be the very best tool for improving the back-strength and overall health of my patients. That tool is the kettlebell – something I had never heard of until two years ago. I have to admit that initially they intimidated me... until I needed them for my own injury.

The Doctor Becomes a Patient

Growing up I was extremely athletic. I lettered in volleyball, softball, and basketball, and I became a Doctor of Chiropractic because I knew firsthand how important a strong and well-aligned body is for physical activity.

As an athlete and a doctor I never experienced any problems with back pain – until about 5 years ago. I was adjusting a very large male patient (6'3", 300lbs), something I never had a problem with in the past because of my use of proper techniques.

Somehow this time was different. When I applied my force into this patient's body to adjust his hips nothing moved. I felt like I had just attempted to pass my hands through a pillar of marble. The resulting wave of resistance immediately reverberated through my entire spine. At that moment I knew I was injured.

I did everything I tell my injured patients to do. I stretched, iced, went for massage, received chiropractic care, physical therapy, and acupuncture treatments. Being in the healthcare profession, the treatment I received was the best available. At times I was in the offices of other providers 5-6 times per week.

Frustration with Traditional Methods

The treatments kept my back functioning so that I could do my job but the repair and healing of my body did not progress. If I sneezed it would throw my back into spasms. If I slept wrong I would have to wear a back support for a week. This was more than pain and inconvenience – my very livelihood was at stake! Nobody wants to put their trust in a chiropractor who clearly has a bad back herself. So I did everything I could to hide and mask my pain from my patients.

Two years into this constant pain I knew I had to try something different. I hired a personal trainer (a former N.F.L. player) who I hoped would whip me into shape. After 6 months, although I gained arm and leg strength, my body did not tone up the way I expected and my back pain did not improve. In fact it got worse. There would be times when I would

spend half an hour on the treadmill in the evening and not be able to get out of bed the next morning.

Impressing A Skeptic

About this time I came across a book titled *Beyond Stretching* by Pavel Tsatsouline. There was something different here. There were stretches in this book that I had never seen before. Even my physical therapy associates were impressed with this new and cutting-edge material. I had a feeling that Pavel could help me with my back, and hoped this might be the answer to restore my health and the future of my practice.

Fortunately I live close to Seattle because at that time Pavel was visiting the city twice each year. I took his stretching, strength and abdominal classes. I was impressed – not something easily accomplished because I do body work myself, but also because I had experienced so many disappointments.

After attending Pavel's classes my stretching improved and my pain was decreasing. In fact, I was so impressed that I encouraged all of my patients and colleagues to attend Pavel's seminars.

I had patients drive 70-80 miles one-way to attend Pavel's seminars, and I would bring no fewer than 10 people with me each time. I always made sure to bring my most acute patients – the ones I knew would experience the most benefit by attending.

When Pavel witnessed my third trek to Seattle with patients in tow, he was impressed with my commitment and suggested that I train with kettlebells – round cast-iron weights, like cannonballs with handles. He even implied that I should become certified as a kettlebell trainer to assist my patients. Well, I was more than slightly intimidated – in my mind there was no way I could throw around this big piece of iron without inflicting further injury. But everything Pavel had showed me so far was helping, and I was intrigued. I ended up purchasing a kettlebell, but picked it up maybe five times before it began to gather dust at home. I was so out of shape that I would get winded swinging the kettlebell only twenty times. Being an athlete, I think it hurt my ego more than anything else!

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One Demonstration Makes All the Difference



Then in October 2004 I was fortunate enough to attend another one of Pavel's seminars that included a quick kettlebell demonstration. One of the people who spoke was Dave Warner, RKC. He

related his experience with severe lower back pain, nerve damage in his leg, and using a cane to walk.

I couldn't believe it – this man had recovered and looked like an Olympic athlete! Right then I knew I had to give kettlebells another chance. I not only needed to try them for myself, but for the benefit of all my patients that were in the same predicament as me.

I hired Dave to show me what to do, and one month into my training I sneezed — and had NO PAIN!! For almost five years I had been in pain from the slightest movement, and after one month of training with kettlebells I was able to sneeze and not have pain. That may not seem like much to you, but for me it was a miracle. I started training harder and signed up for the April 2005 RKC. People must have thought I was crazy because I hadn't exercised in well over a year due to my pain and now I wanted to go and subject myself to three days of Russian boot camp!

The more I trained in preparation for the RKC the more my fitness improved, and my back pain quickly became a thing of the past. I made it to the RKC and survived — believe me, I had lots of sore muscles, but never a twinge in my lower back. I had been given my life back!

Sharing the Secret

When I returned from the training I soon began working with one of my worst back injury patients. The type of patient I see has extreme back pain and most of them have such poor body mechanics and muscle tone that they can't even do a squat correctly. They're afraid to move their body, believing they can prevent spasms by not moving, so I start them out slowly. This particular patient had constant pain and couldn't do even simple household chores such as vacuuming or cleaning dishes.

I started her out with the 9lb. kettlebell, doing squats and swings in 5 sets of 5 reps each. If you've ever lifted the 9lb. bell, it weighs almost nothing, but it was heavy enough for her body and started

improving her strength. We continued her chiropractic adjustments twice per week to control her pain and prevent spasms. After three weeks I introduced an 18-pounder for one of the five sets, and her spine was starting to hold so I reduced her office visits to once per week.

I have been training her now for five weeks and she has only minimal pain. She recently vacuumed her whole house without assistance — something she had not done in three years. You've never seen someone so excited about being able to vacuum the floor!

It's now been almost two weeks since she needed an adjustment and I've added the figure eight drill with the 18lb. bell to expand her range of motion. It's important for those with chronic back pain to expand their abilities so they don't give in to the fear of triggering a back spasm. Kettlebells allow this incremental increase, and it builds confidence in patients like nothing I've seen before.

Kettlebells – the Missing Ingredient?

I've seen the kettlebell workout help one of my associates with his asthma. Another eliminated her wrist and knee pain after 6 weeks of doing kettlebells. Like me, she was very worried about her career as a chiropractor because her wrists kept giving out. Now she is stronger and more confident that she can do her job for years to come.



I'm still amazed at the improvement in back stability that comes with kettlebell training. I feel like a kid again! I can honestly say I am in the best shape of my life — after only 8 months! I now work a full day in my practice and then train people with kettlebells one-on-one and in groups 4-5 nights a week.

I now believe kettlebells to be the single most important tool that can be added to a recovery training schedule. There are too many people out there who cannot enjoy life, who are merely existing because of their back pain. Their abdominals and back muscles are so weak from repeated spasms that they fall apart with any activity. I believe all of them can be helped with kettlebells.

It's important to start slowly, primarily because of the weakness and lost muscle tone that develops from repeated muscle spasms, but also

My favorite workout is a circuit. I do 10 double clean and jerks with 2 12kg kbs, jump rope 50 times, then swing 10 times with a 20kg kb. Then I do 9 clean and jerks, jump rope 50 times, then swing 9 times. I continue this 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Two days a week I just do swings and snatches. I will usually use the 20kg and 24kg swings and the 16kg for snatches.



because of the mental block created by the fear of pain. Kettlebells allow you to do this. I know, because I've been there. But at 39 years old I now feel better than I did in my twenty's, and I can't wait to see how I will be a year from now. Thank you Pavel for giving me my life back!

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