



Proper lifting technique when using kettlebells, dumbbells, or barbells

SUMMARY: Mastering free weight exercises involves more than correct execution; attention to smooth transitions is crucial. Meticulous focus on movement from the starting position to the rack or floor is key for a well-rounded approach. Begin with a warm-up, maintain proper positioning, and ensure a neutral spine. Engage the core and drive through heels for leg drive. Lift smoothly, keeping the weight close to your body. After lifting, maintain a neutral spine, pause, and then proceed. Consistent breathing, personalized bracing cues, and controlled transitions further enhance your lifting technique and reduce injury risks.

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Proper lifting technique when using kettlebells, dumbbells, or barbells. Following these guidelines in any lift you do with a free weight. **Remember, it's not just about the exercise itself but also about the transitions from the starting position to the rack or floor, and vice versa that you need to be concerned with. It's also important to have the requisite strength and technique for the specific exercise you are performing (see our self test protocols in our guidebook).**

Warm up: Begin your lifting session with light cardio exercises or dynamic stretches to warm up your muscles and increase blood flow.

- **Positioning:** Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, maintaining a straight back and engaged core. This alignment provides a solid foundation for the lift.
- **Grip and spinal position:** Squat down and grip the kettlebell, dumbbell, or barbell while ensuring a neutral spine position. Avoid rounding or arching your back to minimize the risk of injury.
- **Neutral spine:** Maintain a neutral spine position throughout the lift. Avoid excessive bending or twisting of the spine, as this can lead to injuries.
- **Core engagement:** Brace your core by tightening your abdominal muscles to at least 20% of your maximum contraction. This helps stabilize your spine and protect your lower back during the lift. Different cues, such as "drawing the navel in" or "brace like someone is about to punch you in the stomach," can be used to activate the core effectively.
- **Leg drive:** Engage your leg muscles and drive through your heels to initiate the lift, while maintaining neutral spine and core engagement. This technique helps generate power from the lower body and reduces strain on your back.
- **Controlled lift:** Lift the weight smoothly and in a controlled manner, keeping it close to your body. This technique minimizes the strain on your muscles and joints. See next page on Fast Lifting.
- **Standing position:** Once you have lifted the weight, stand straight with a neutral spine. Pause briefly to ensure you have control over the weight before proceeding with any additional movements.
- **Proper breathing:** Remember to breathe consistently throughout the lift. Avoid holding your breath, as it can increase intra-abdominal pressure and interfere with your core stability.
- **Individual bracing cues:** Different individuals and coaches may use various cues to help with core bracing. The objective is to engage and stabilize the core effectively, regardless of the specific cue used.
- **Smooth transitions:** Pay attention to the transitions from the starting position to the end position, and vice versa. Control the weight as you return it to the rack or floor, maintaining proper form and avoiding sudden drops or releases.

By following these guidelines, you can enhance your lifting technique and reduce the risk of injury during kettlebell, dumbbell, or barbell exercises. However, it's always advisable to seek guidance from a qualified fitness professional for personalized instruction and to ensure proper form and technique.