

STRONG SHOWING

Kettlebells can give your fitness level a lift

Once you get past the fear of dropping it on your foot, banging it on your head or throwing your back out of joint, you can get attached to a kettlebell.

Lori Chenevert did. So much so that she can't let it go.

"Within three months, I felt like a new woman," she said.

Bored with conventional weight training and gym workouts, Chenevert discovered kettlebells — round cast-iron weights with suitcase-like handles — in January. Originally used to train the Soviet army, they could pass for a medieval dungeon ball without the chain leg shackles.

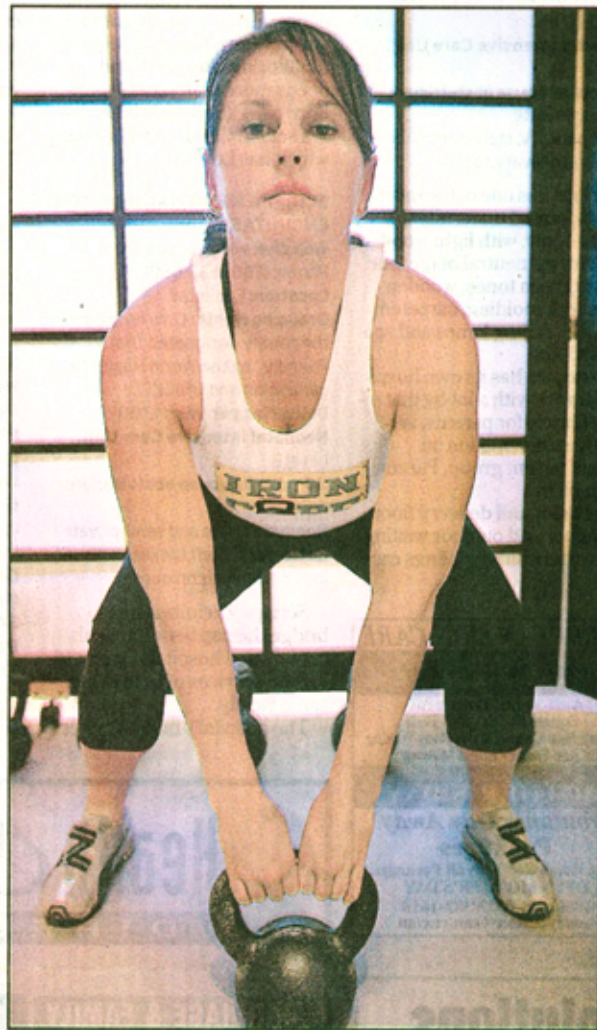
Yet they're designed to challenge the body's core from all angles. As an instructor takes you through a series of moves with the kettlebell — pulling, lifting, raising and swinging — you can tone and strengthen such crucial areas as the backside, thighs, hips and abs.

Just make sure you get a good grip and work with a weight you can safely handle. (The weights range from 9 to 88 pounds.) And don't let go. The idea is to stay attached or anchored to the weight as you go through a full range of motion. It's OK to drop a pants size, which Chenevert credits the kettlebell with helping her do, but not the bell.

Chenevert, 25, got the hang of it at Iron Core, a kettlebell training center that opened in La Jolla in October. A former softball outfielder and team captain at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, she slowly lost fitness and muscle tone as she focused on a marketing career in San Diego.

"Without that team atmosphere, with people pushing and driving each other, I lost the motivation," she said. "I don't like everyday type of training. I was looking for something that was new and interesting, something that pushed me."

Now she has an instructor's certification in kettlebell training, earned in a 27-hour course. "Working out is a new part of my life," she said. "I've gone from someone who made excuses to almost making it a career."



Lori Chenevert does "the swing" using a cast-iron kettlebell.

Howard Lipin / Union-Tribune

BELL CURVES: Chenevert, an Ocean Beach resident, said she has lost about 10 percent of her body fat while dropping more than 10 pounds since beginning kettlebell workouts in January. At 5-foot-2 and 138 pounds, she's still striving to get leaner and more defined on three one-hour kettlebell workouts per week.

Each workout incorporates a variety of moves, including two drills that simulate traditional Olympic lifting — the clean (using the hips to lift from the floor to the top of the chest) and snatch (again stressing the lower body as you generate the power to extend the bell over your head). Chenevert has graduated to the

26- and 35-pound bells with a goal of developing functional strength she can transfer to everyday activities.

ON THE RUN: Never one for long distances, Chenevert rarely jogged beyond two miles — and sporadically at that — before taking up kettlebells. Now, to complement her strength, balance and flexibility training at Iron Core, she runs four times a week. Total mileage: 15 to 20, with a long run of 6 miles, usually with a group of friends that helps provide motivation "like a little track club." She'll take at least one rest day a week, when a walk or beach volleyball takes the place of a run or kettlebell workout.

CALORIES THAT COUNT: "I know what's good and what's bad and how my body reacts," Chenevert said. "So I make a personal choice, and it's usually well-balanced." To stabilize blood sugar levels, she combines protein with carbohydrates with each meal, beginning with a breakfast of egg whites and wheat toast. Lunch might be a mixed green salad with chicken or a turkey sandwich. Chicken, grilled or baked and often with sun-dried tomatoes, is a typical dinner. Fruits and vegetables work for snacks. "I've never been big on (energy) bars or shakes," she said. "If I want a scoop of ice cream, I go for it. I don't believe in diets. If you deprive yourself, you can go binge crazy."

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