

Medical doctor Kristann Heinz sees kettlebells as premier exercise tool to combat America's obesity epidemic — and a perfect way for busy mothers to stay fit by working out at home

Kristann Heinz, M.D. of Upper Black Eddy, PA earned her Russian Kettlebell Challenge certification in September of 2003. She was interviewed by Stephanie Watson.

Dragon Door: Would you talk a little about your background?

Kristann Heinz: I am both a registered dietician and a medical doctor. After seven years of practicing in dietetics and nutrition and working with people who have had chronic illness and diabetes, I went back to medical school with a focus on prevention. I completed that, and now I'm in the middle of my residency training program, in Family Practice. I also am studying a Korean martial art form called Shim Gum Do and am working toward my second black belt in Shin Bop, a weaponless system of self-defense.

D.D.: Will you start your own practice after the residency?

K.H.: Once I finish my residency, my goal is to own a practice which focuses on obesity and obesity-related disorders such as hypertension, hypercholesterolemia and diabetes. I envision an integrated approach with a focus on nutrition and exercise education.

The current medical model for people with chronic diseases is "polypharmacy." This approach focuses on each symptom and a corresponding drug prescription. I hope to focus my efforts on decreasing the use of multiple medications by encouraging and teaching healthful nutrition and exercise programs.

As people lose weight through proper nutrition and exercise, they see an impact on their blood pressure, blood glucose or cholesterol levels. This in turn safely allows people to reduce or discontinue medications that they may take. I feel the kettlebell exercise program will be an incredible addition to my vision of total health.

D.D.: How would kettlebells fit into the prevention mode that you're talking about?

K.H.: Well, I think this brings us to an interesting story that was shared with me by one of the participants here this weekend at the seminar. He mentioned that he had recently been diagnosed with high blood pressure. He said that after he had gone to the doctor, he was put on two medications right off the bat, without any kind of discussion about lifestyle change, or any "Let's sort of slowly try this." You know, "Let's start from



the least invasive method and work towards the most invasive," which is sort of how I approach problems.

He started a training program and began working out regularly with his kettlebells. After his next appointment, his blood pressure was completely controlled and he was able to discontinue his medication. This is a really wonderful success story about how kettlebell exercise can directly affect a chronic disease and its progression.

D.D.: Why do you endorse kettlebells over some other form of exercise?

K.H.: The kettlebell program can be modified to a variety of people of all ages, body types and physical abilities. People can take training with kettlebells at their own pace. They can start with the very basics, like the swing, and adjust or modify to accommodate their exercise goals.

The other thing I like about kettlebells is that after initial training, people can be independent and self-sufficient in their exercise schedule. They are not reliant on a gym; it does not require a lot of equipment and for that matter, not a lot of space to get a good workout. You can have one

size kettlebell, and you can start with that. I mean, you can even just walk around with it in your house, and you're going to be burning calories.

You can have just one kettlebell, and begin a total exercise program. For these reasons, I think kettlebells are unique.

D.D.: What about your personal experience?

K.H.: I got interested in kettlebells about a year ago. My husband actually found them on the Internet and ordered some kettlebells and a book for me. He said, "Oh, I think you're really going to like these, because you get so bored!" I have found that I don't get bored and even my Mom has found them and loved them.

D.D.: Bored with what?

K.H.: Just doing repetitive exercises drove me crazy. I also used to be a runner but knee problems prohibit that kind of exercise. So, when I found kettlebells, I was excited that I could get a great cardiovascular workout and do weight training in a short amount of time.

And having a small child at home and working like a maniac, it was the perfect thing. I can do a daily 15-20 minute workout and maintain my physical conditioning during busy times. I'm not going to lose it all if I have to work 100 hours a week for a couple of weeks. It's something that does not take a lot of time to feel that you get a very intense workout.

And for the first time since having my child, I feel like I'm able to get an intense workout without taking an hour and a half. You don't have an hour and a half when you're a mother! You just don't. So to be able to do it in 20 minutes and feel like you got a workout, like you're sweating profusely, you've got the adrenaline rush, and you're ready for more...it's huge! I mean, you're always looking for that.

I see women out there trying all of these different things: the aerobic machines, the step thing, this thing or that thing. But none of them can keep you interested. With kettlebells, you can do so many different things and you can get such an intense workout. It's great.

Women with small children never have a consistent schedule. You're constantly running between things, you're constantly trying to get everything done. Juggling the house, juggling your work, the baby...but this is something I used to do when Astrid would go to sleep at night: I would just take it a kettlebell out and do 20 snatches on each side. And then I could drop dead. Because



you don't have a lot of time, and you're so exhausted, and the last thing you have energy to think about it going to the gym.

And the nice thing about this is that kettlebells exhaust you in a way that re-energizes you. You know, before I left to come to this seminar, I didn't even think I wanted to come. I was like, "Aw, I'm so exhausted." Everything is out—you give, give, give. You're a mother, you give at home, you give at work (and the kind of work I do is very demanding), and there's nothing for you. I hear women say that over and over again. They say it all the time: "I'm left at the end of the day with nothing for me!"

The nice thing about kettlebells is that you can do them in your home and integrate them into your personal daily schedule. Exercise has been shown to positively impact your psychological well-being. It's been shown to be as effective as taking Prozac, if you can exercise three to four times a week. I have found kettlebell training can restore energy levels and leave one feeling physically and emotionally recharged.

D.D.: From what you said earlier, you've always been athletic, running and doing various isometric exercise programs. Have kettlebells pushed you in a way that those other exercise forms didn't?

K.H.: It keeps my interest longer because it requires me to be present in my body and actively pay attention during the workout. I have also found it to be synergistic with martial arts training. Kettlebells has helped me to build core strength and dynamic strength, which in turn has helped me with balance and the ability to perform explosive martial arts techniques.

D.D.: What has been your experience being at the kettlebell certification so far?

K.H.: I've found it invaluable. It's been great. Going from working with the books and the video to having someone physically there to instruct and coach me has been wonderful. I have really gotten a sense of how I can maximize my time and become more efficient with my exercises.

The other thing that's interesting about the seminar is that not only does it teach you the potential of the range of activities you could be doing with a kettlebell, it also teaches you something really important, and that is: what is your own potential. You know, not only what are the things you need to work on, but also where can you go with this. In terms of not only what you can apply to help other people, but what you can apply to yourself. And you don't get that from a book.

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