

A GUIDE TO CHOOSING

the Best Type of

WEIGHTS

for Your Workouts



W E L L N E S S S E R I E S

A Guide to Choosing the Best Type of Weights for Your Workout Goals

From losing weight, to toning muscles or building endurance, working with weights can get you closer to your fitness goal. There are five different types of weights available for weight training. They are:

- Bodyweight
- Resistance band
- Barbell
- Dumbbell
- Kettlebell

Most of the barbells and dumbbell moves can also be replicated on a weight machine, but we are focusing on using free weights because that is mostly what is found in home gyms. Bodyweight and resistance band training are great when traveling because they require little to no equipment and the equipment that is required (resistance bands) weighs almost nothing and doesn't take up much space in luggage. However in this guide, we are going to skip the bodyweight and resistance bands and focus on the last three types.

Types of Free Weights

Barbell – As its name suggests, it is a free weight that uses a bar ranging in length from 4 to 8 feet in which plates of weights can be slid onto each end. It has a weight stop in from each end of the bar, so the weights can't slide toward the middle and a weight stop called a collar on each end that is applied after weights are slid onto the bar to keep the weights from falling off. A barbell is lifted with both hands. Plates come in weights ranging from 2.5 lbs. to 100 lbs. although usually 45 lbs. plates are the largest found in most home gyms.

Dumbbell – These look like miniature barbells except the bar is much shorter - usually only long enough to grip with one hand and they have equal weights on each end of the bar. The weights are usually molded onto the bar, however, there are some types where the weights are removable similar to a barbell. They can be used singularly with only one hand or in pairs using both hands. Weights generally range from a low of 2 lbs. to 100 lbs. however more commonly found are weights up to 50 lbs. each.

Kettlebell – These resemble a cannonball with a curved handle on top. They are usually cast as one piece and come in various weights ranging from 5 to 50 lbs.

Most free weights come in increments of 5 lbs. and can be purchased as sets or individually. Each type not only works different muscles, but also works the same muscles differently as we will see later in this guide.



Which Type of Free Weight Is Best for Strength Training?

The answer to this question is it depends on your goals. As noted, each type works different muscles and can even work the same muscles in different ways. For example, doing bicep curls with a dumbbell and kettlebell. When using a dumbbell, the weight is in line with the hand that you are gripping the dumbbell with, but doing the same move with a kettlebell, the weight is always hanging down under the hand holding the handle. It is the placement of the weight in this case that works the bicep differently.

Barbells tend to work muscles in pairs (but not necessarily equally as explained below) because in the case of upper body, you are working the muscles on each side of your body by lifting with both hands. With dumbbells, the moves are more isolated in that you are only working muscles on the side being lifted with that one hand.

However because each arm is worked independent of the other one, each one should be worked equally creating a more balanced physique. With a barbell, one hand could be more dominant than the other without you realizing it, which means one hand is lifting more weight than the other leading to more of an unbalanced look as far as muscles are concerned.



Training Styles

For the amateur person strength training, they usually train for one of two different styles: either to increase muscle mass and strength or to tone existing muscle without adding much bulk.

Increase Mass and Strength

This involves using heavier weight, but for fewer repetitions. A good training regimen would be doing 1 to 6 reps of each exercise in 3 to 6 sets. Rest for 1 to 2 minutes between sets.

Increase Tone

This involves using lighter weight, but doing more repetitions. A set consist of 8 to 12 repetitions of an exercise for 1 to 3 sets. Rest for 1 to 2 minutes between sets.

In both styles once maxed out on reps and sets, add more weight and drop back on the number of reps per set or even on the number of sets. Work up to the max reps and sets per exercise and repeat the process all over again. To see the best results in either style, it is important to always keep challenging your muscles.

Basic Moves Using Each Type of Weight

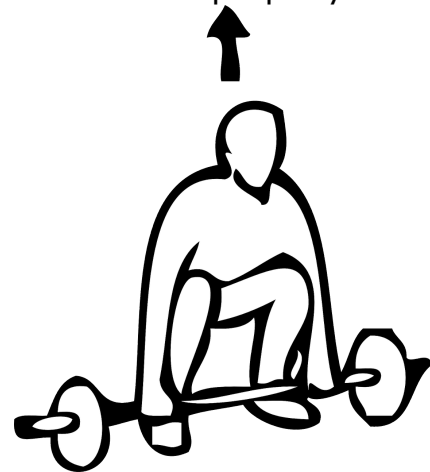
Barbell

The three main exercises using barbells are the bench press, squat and deadlift.

Bench press – With minimal weight on the bar and lying on a bench with your feet on the floor, grab the bar from underneath, push the bar up from the cradle and lower it down to your chest. You want to use minimal weight or even no weight to get your hand spacing and bar balance correct before moving onto heavier weights. In the down position, your forearms should be close to vertical and on either side of your torso. Re-rack the bar in its cradle.

Next put a *reasonable* amount of weight on the bar, uncradle it and slowly push it up until your arms are fully extended. Next, lower it until it touches your chest bone. Now push it back up again until your arms are fully extended. That is one rep. Starting out with a minimal amount of weight on the bar will give you a “feel” for it as far as how to balance it properly.

Squat – Start from the standing position with a weighted bar in the cradle of a bar rack. Now bend at the knees until your shoulders will clear underneath the bar. Holding the bar with each hand spaced more than shoulder-width apart and it resting on your shoulders, push up with your knees until your legs are straight. Keep your torso as straight as possible. Lower down until your upper thighs are parallel with the floor. Push back up to the standing position. That is one rep.



Deadlift – With a weighted bar resting on the floor, bend at the knees and grab it with both hands overhand – hands on top of the bar. Keeping your back straight, push up with your legs until you are in the standing position with your arms hanging straight down. Now lower the bar back down to the floor. That is one rep.

Dumbbell

Bench Press – Position a pair of dumbbells one on each side of the bench. Start by lying on a bench with your feet flat on the floor. Reach down and grab a dumbbell with each hand. Bring the dumbbells up until they are approximately level with your chest bone. Now push them up straight up until your arms are fully extended. Bring the dumbbells back down until they are on each side of your chest again. That is one rep.

Bicep Curl – Sitting crosswise on a bench, reach down between your legs and grab a dumbbell underhand. Rest your elbow on the inner part of your upper leg and while bending at the elbow, slowly lift the dumbbell until your forearm is in the upright position. Now slowly lower it back down until your arm is hanging straight down again. That is one rep. Be sure to work the other arm to keep the biceps balanced.

Tricep Kickbacks – Start by resting one knee on the bench with the same side arm holding onto the edge of the bench. With your free hand, grab a dumbbell. Lift it up until your upper arm is parallel with the floor. Straighten out the elbow thus moving the dumbbell back behind and to the side of you. Now bring the dumbbell forward to the starting position. That is one rep.



Kettlebells

Deadlift – Place a dumbbell on the floor between your feet. Reposition your feet so they are shoulder-width apart. Bend over at the waist, move your hips back and grab the kettlebell handle. Now start lifting the kettlebell while throwing your hips forward. Lower the kettlebell back down again. That is one rep. The kettlebell deadlift should be perfected first before moving on to the swing.

Swing – Start with your feet farther than shoulder-width apart. Bending at the knees, reach down and grab a kettlebell. Now stand straight up so the kettlebell is hanging in front of you. To get the swinging motion going, squat down while at the same time pushing the kettlebell back between your legs as far as it will go. Next bring the kettlebell forward by thrusting the hips forward while at the same time standing up. Let the kettlebell swing as far forward and up as far as it can. Once at its peak height, bring it back down, squat and swing it between your legs. That is one rep.



Goblet Squat – Start by holding a kettlebell by the “horns” under your chin. The horns are the side parts of the handle that goes from the horizontal part of the handle down into the weight. Bend at the knees and drop down until your hamstrings touch the calves of your legs. Now push up again to the starting position. That is one rep.

Press – With feet shoulder-width apart, grab the kettlebell by with your left hand by the top part of the handle with your palm facing between your legs. Ensure your palm is facing to the right. Lift the kettlebell while bending at the elbow and rotating the kettlebell so your palm is facing your body and about shoulder high. From this position, push your arm up while rotating the kettlebell so your palm is facing forward.

There are many more moves that can be done with each type of weight, but these three in each type will get you started. In the beginning, be sure to work on form and not how much weight you can lift. Once the form is correct, then add weight. Having the correct form in place before moving on to heavier weight is not only necessary to see the results you want, but also to reduce the risk of injury.