The 3 Key Distinctions of the Kettlebell Press

The kettlebell press is a unique overhead press variation. Why would this press be any different from a dumbbell, barbell, or any other press? That's a question I hear a lot.

So, I'm going to explain why the kettlebell press is, indeed, a different and distinct press. You should care about this topic because the kettlebell press is simply a safer and more efficient way to press heavy weight overhead. When I learned the nuances of this movement, I can't tell you how much of a difference it made, not only in my pressing strength, but in my overall shoulder health. I'll explain this movement's unique distinctions so you can discover the key benefits, as I have.

Shoulder Injuries and Strength Training

First, we need to address the prevalence of shoulder injuries with resistance exercise in general. Soft tissue injuries (injuries to the rotator cuff, biceps tendon, and pec major), acromioclavicular disorders, instability, dislocations, mobility restrictions, and nerve injuries can occur with strength training and have been reported in research on resistance exercise.

However, **the vast majority of strength-training related injuries can be avoided by focusing on proper techniques**, improving muscle imbalances, maintaining or improving shoulder joint mobility, and avoiding stressful joint positions such as the high-five position (we'll discuss this momentarily).

1. The Tool Design

There is a clear and obvious difference between the kettlebell and any other tool. My experience with pressing has convinced me that the unique design of the kettlebell makes it a different kind of press.

Meaning, the hand is positioned in front of the clavicle and the kettlebell is resting approximately just in front of and slightly below the shoulder joint. The kettlebell rack is a more optimal resting or starting position to press from. No matter how you perform a press with a dumbbell or barbell, the rack position is not as comfortable or as strong as the kettlebell rack.

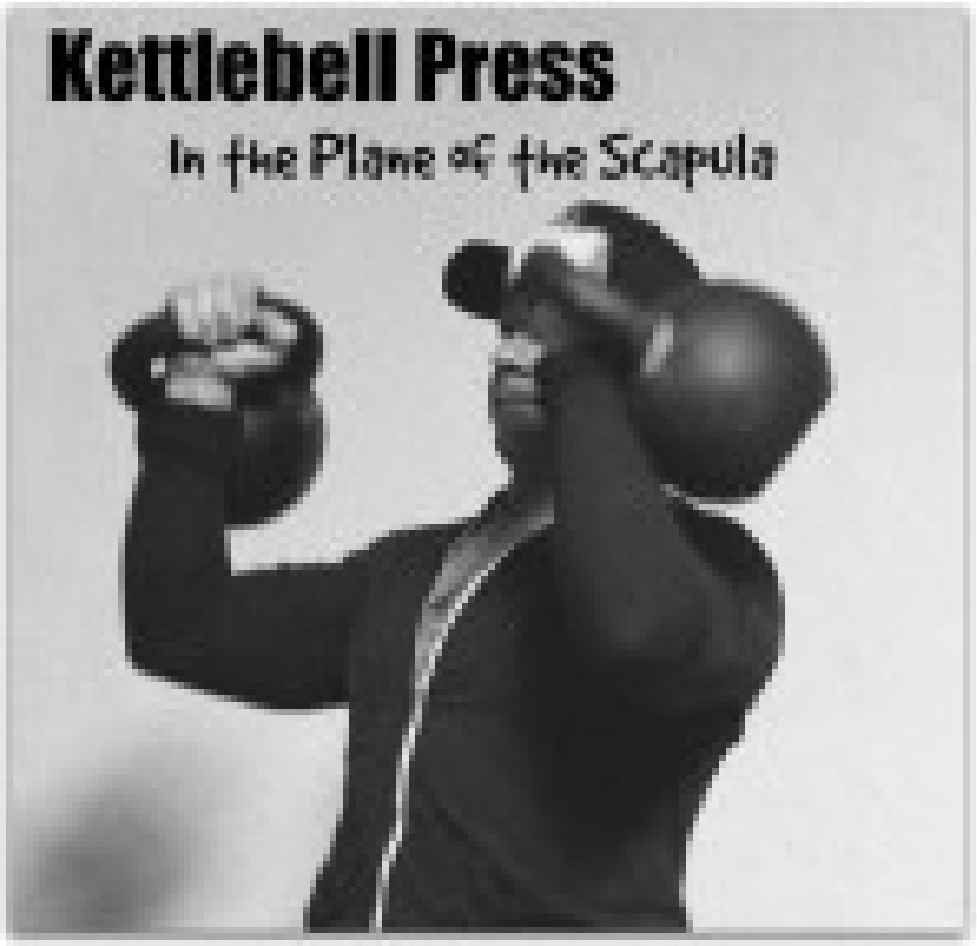
The design of the kettlebell allows you to begin the press from the kettlebell rack position.

The kettlebell's offset handle allows the weight distribution to rest on the outside of the forearm. Not only is this a comfortable position to press from, but a stronger one. In addition, **the wrist is in a neutral position** (it's neither flexed nor overly extended), which is optimal for the wrist.

Finally, when pressing with the kettlebell, you are free to move and adjust the plane of motion, which is not as restrictive as with the barbell. Believe me, I love overhead pressing with a barbell, but it is different from the more natural movement you can perform with the kettlebell.

2. Natural Movement Tendencies

This is perhaps the single most important point and key distinction of the kettlebell press. **The *plane of the scapula* (POS) is the normal resting position of the scapula on the posterior aspect of the rib cage** (the shoulder blade resting on the back of the ribs). The scapula (shoulder blade) sits in a position that is approximately 30 to 45 degrees anterior to the frontal plane. This means the glenoid (the socket) and humeral head (the ball) are positioned in the safest and least stressful position when the arm is moving through arm elevation. In other words, your shoulder is in an optimal position when you raise your arm (or in this case, perform a press).



The natural resting position of the scapula, which is 30 to 45 degrees anterior to the frontal plane. This is the optimal plane of motion for shoulder joint elevation.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the high-five position. The high-five is a position of shoulder abduction and external rotation that places a great amount of strain on the entire shoulder complex, not just the glenohumoral joint (the shoulder joint). Soft tissue injuries, such as pec major ruptures, have been reported to occur most often in the high-five position. This position also stresses other anterior structures and the capsule in the shoulder joint. The bottom line is that the high-five position is not good for the shoulder.

The natural tendency with a dumbbell is to press in the high-five position.

The **kettlebell** press allows for the more natural pressing groove that occurs in the POS and not in the high-five position. The majority of people who perform **dumbbell** presses will not press in the POS because being in the POS while performing the dumbbell press is *not* natural. Can you press a dumbbell in the POS? Yes, but the *natural tendency* with a dumbbell is to press in a position more aligned with the high-five position.

3. The Wedging Effect

This one is a minor difference between the kettlebell and other tools, but it's the little things that make a big difference, right?

"Wedging" is when you wedge your body between the kettlebell and the floor to get tight and stable prior to initiating your press. **You use full-body tension to increase stability between the ground and the kettlebell (or any other tool) to generate more force production.** Doing this *does* make a difference.

Once again, you can certainly "wedge" with a barbell or a dumbbell, but the shape and design of the kettlebell make it different than the other tools. This is because you are in such a stable, tight position with the kettlebell. If you try this and compare the feeling between a dumbbell and a kettlebell, you'll see exactly what I mean.

The "wedge" creates a position of strength. You have a stronger connection with the floor and the kettlebell in the rack, which means a stronger base prior to pressing. This small difference enables a stronger and more efficient overhead press.

Try the Kettlebell Press Yourself and Feel the Difference

These are the three key distinctions of the kettlebell press based on my own observations and experience. The tool design, the natural movement in the plane of the scapula, and the wedging effect make the kettlebell press a unique variation.

Could you make the argument that you can just as easily do these techniques with a dumbbell? You can do anything you want, but **it's a lot more comfortable and efficient to press with a kettlebell compared to other tools**. The shoulder position is optimized to prevent the provocative "high five" position and you will simply have more pressing power for a stronger overhead press.

If you've yet to discover the difference between the kettlebell press and other presses, my advice would be to register for a course or Certification to fully understand and experience the difference for yourself. Learn these nuances and experience these distinctions. Then, get back to me and let me know what you think.