Hand Care for Kettlebell Training by Kari Syme

It’s important to take care of your hands when you get into kettlebell training, increase your kettlebell training, or start preparing for and then attend a kettlebell certification. If you don’t take care of your hands as you build up calluses from handling your bells, you’re basically asking for a ripped callus or a nasty blister, and that’s no fun at all. Don’t worry, hand care is pretty easy.

If you scoff at the need to moisturize your hands, pumice your calluses, or take precautions when you know you’ll be handling your kettlebells a lot, think about how willing you are to take 3 to 5 days (or more if you don’t care for it properly) away from your training while you wait for your hands to heal enough to handle your kettlebells again.

It only takes one bad rep to catch a callus at the wrong angle and tear it off, which is why pumicing and moisturizing your hands to avoid dry skin and edges is important.

Before any hand care, make sure you’re holding your bell correctly during swings and snatches. Using the hook of your fingers while swinging or snatching instead of having the bell deep in your palm decreases wear and tear on the hands. Also, make sure you’re building up your kettlebell training at a pace your hands can handle. Unless you’re at a certification or workshop in which you know you’ll be doing a LOT of bell handling, take your time, build up your hands’ and skin’s endurance and protection (calluses).

Moisturize:

First, if your hands tend to dry out, whether from daily life, kettlebells, chalk, or any other reason, find a lotion or balm or cream you like and use it. I suffered from cracking hand skin and tried over 15 products in the course of a year in an attempt to find one that could keep my hands from drying out, and the only one that does the job without feeling greasy is Keys Tortuga Super Emollient Lotion. Other people in the lifting and kettlebell world like CornHuskers Lotion and Bag Balm. I checked those out, but I avoid potentially harmful chemicals in skin care products, so I didn’t try them.

Pumice Stone:

You can find pumice stones at most drugstores, body care stores, places like Target or Wal-Mart, or online.
You use a pumice stone to file down the sharp edges of your calluses and keep them present but smoother. To use one, wait until end of your shower or bath, when your skin has softened, or soak your hands for a few minutes in warm or hot water before using the pumice stone.

How often you’ll need to pumice depends on your hands. I do it whenever I start noticing sharp edges or peeling on my calluses, which is every one or two weeks.

**Hand Protection While Training:**

Although moisturizing and using a pumice stone to file down the sharp edges of your calluses is an important hand care step, if you know you’ll be increasing your kettlebell training, adding a new or advanced exercise, or attending a kettlebell certification that will involve a lot of wear and tear on your hands, you may need a bit more than that to keep your hands from turning into a painful red, oozing mess.

Here are the most popular options:

**The Sock Sleeve**

Tracy Reifkind, a queen of **kettlebell swings** who lost over 100lbs training with kettlebells, recommends the sock sleeve.

![Sock Sleeve](tracyrif.blogspot.com)

You can find a video by searching “How to Use TracyRif’s Socksleeves” on YouTube.
Instructions from her blog (tracyrif.blogspot.com):
“The Tracy Rif Sock Sleeve for High Rep Snatch and Swing Training:
All one has to do is find a pair of medium thickness socks and cut the top, elastic portion of the sock off. A two inch section is best, although one can cut three inches if they have very large hands. We have found crew socks, as opposed to tube socks, to work best, although feel free to experiment. New socks work best as the fresh elastic helps to keep the sleeve in the right part of the hand.

Simply slide the sleeve over the top of the hand covering the lower portion of the fingers and the top section of the palm of the hand. Just where the bell should sit if properly held! That’s it! … You can use this all the time or just when you feel tender or hot spots on the calluses.”

Taping

There are several ways to tape your hands. This picture shows the final step of one of the most popular and effective taping methods for kettlebell training, from Mark Reifkind:

See step by step pictures at rifsblog.blogspot.com/2007/05/how-to-tape-your-hands.html

He says:
“This has proven to be a most effective method of taping hands as a preventative to tears or after one has already torn. … Use Johnsons athletic tape, the cloth porous kind. The cheap stuff and/or plastic tape does not work. Once you set the strips, you can anchor at the body and at the end of the workout take off the anchor and reuse the ‘grip’ another day or two. … There is an art to getting the tape right over the hot spot(s) and not rolling or bunching, and practice makes perfect.”
For some people’s skin, or for those who haven’t mastered the taping, it may make the tape feel like it’s pulling on your calluses, which isn’t pleasant. You can combine the taping method with putting small band-aids (Kari likes Band-Aid ActiveFlex) across the calluses at the base of your fingers, then taping over that. Band-Aids alone don’t work for long because they peel up, but taping over them protects your hands from the tape and keeps the Band-Aids in place.

Make-Your-Own Fingerless Gloves:

Get some tight glove liners, preferably those made of a smooth polyester-type material. Go down a size or two, or men can try a ladies’ size, or ladies can try a kids’ size. They should be tight without cutting off your circulation. Then, cut off most of the fingers of the gloves. You’ll still have your fingers to hook the bell without slippery fabric on them, but the glove will protect your calluses.

But I Already Ripped A Callus or Got a Blister – Now What?

If you do tear a callus, RKC Kristann Heinz recommends the following basic blister care to help it heal properly:


If you aren’t willing to take time off from training or are in the middle of a workshop or certification, RKC Dave Cronk has another method (it involves super glue):