

## **USING PILATES TO MASTER THE TURKISH GET-UP**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Turkish Get Up is a complex, yet graceful, movement revered by kettlebell enthusiasts as both a tool for assessment and a multi-faceted exercise. Like Pilates, the Turkish Get-Up requires awareness, precision, balance, and harmony of the body. (Isacowitz, 7.) It is a total-body movement incorporating strength, mobility, and stability. Additionally, the Turkish Get Up provides functional benefits, as the movement itself mimics developmental movement patterns such as rolling, kneeling, crawling, and standing. (Marker; Pavel, 37.) This paper will discuss the mechanics of the Turkish Get Up and develop a program for an athlete seeking to utilize Pilates as a cross-training tool to master the Turkish Get-Up.

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## THE TURKISH GET UP

The Turkish Get-Up is traditionally performed with a kettlebell.<sup>1</sup> The movement is said to have originated at least 200 years ago and has been used as a training tool by old-time strongmen, Turkish Janissaries, and Russian soldiers. (Cambio; Pavel, 37.) The benefits of the Turkish Get-Up are many, and include: promoting cross-lateralization, upper and lower body stability, and reflexive stability of the trunk and extremities; creating reciprocal work in the upper and lower extremities; stimulating the vestibular, visual, and proprioception systems; promoting spatial awareness; and developing upper body strength, trunk strength, and hip strength. (Hetzler.) It has been said that, “[o]nce you have conquered the get-up, you will be the master of your body, not its guest.” (Pavel 5.)

Like Pilates, performance of the Turkish Get-Up centers around quality of movement and conditioning of the entire body. (Isakowicz, 6; Pavel, 37-38, 44.) Pilates principles of awareness, balance, breath, concentration, center, control, efficiency, flow, precision, and harmony, are all applicable to the Turkish Get-Up, which is a deliberately-paced, open-chain movement beginning in a supine position and slowing progressing to standing. (Isakowicz, 7.) It requires trunk and



StrongFirst-certified instructor, Jojo, demonstrates Stage One with a flexed left elbow and closed fist

shoulder stability, hip and shoulder mobility, abdominal, quadricep, hamstring, and gluteal strength, and thoracic extension and rotation.

The Turkish-Get Up has six main stages, described below in terms of a right-handed get-up:

Stage One begins in a supine position with the kettlebell pressed above the right shoulder toward the ceiling.

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<sup>1</sup> “A kettlebell is a type of dumbbell or free weight that I round with a flat base and an arced handle. It looks like a cannonball with a handle or a teapot without the spout . . . .” (*KETTLEBELLSUSA.*)

The shoulder is externally rotated, in mid-range flexion, the latissimus dorsi is contracted, and the supraspinatus, infraspinatus, teres minor, and subscapularis are engaged or “packed.” The right knee is bent and the right foot is flat on the ground. The left arm is on the ground at a 45-degree angle toward the left leg, which is extended parallel to the left arm.

Stage Two could be considered a combination of the Roll-Up and Corkscrew Advanced. In this roll-to-elbow stage, the powerhouse is recruited as the athlete contracts his left obliques and latissimus dorsi to roll to his elbow, adjusting the right shoulder position so that the kettlebell remains overhead. Strong abdominals keep the extended leg from lifting when performing this movement. The muscles of the left and right shoulder girdle work to keep the body lifted and the kettlebell overhead.

In Stage Three, the athlete posts from the elbow to the palm of the hand to sit tall, while keeping the kettlebell overhead. This requires further abdominal contraction, rotation of the right arm in the shoulder socket, and stabilization of both shoulders. The bilateral latissimus dorsi work to keep both scapulae depressed. Flexible hamstrings and strong back extensors assist in achieving the upright seated position.

Stage Four is known as the Sweep, which combines the principles of Back Support and Shoulder Bridge Prep. The right hip extensors engage as both hips lift into a bridge position before the extended left leg bends and sweeps under and behind the right leg. Shoulder stability and pelvic-lumbar stabilization are crucial for this movement. The left knee is placed on the ground in



Jojo's gaze stays on the kettlebell throughout Stages One, Two, and Three



Jojo's gaze and hand position are unchanged as his lower body moves during Stage Four

line with the left hand; the left hip is externally rotated so that the left hand, knee, and foot are in a straight line. The right leg is perpendicular to the left and the hips are hinged back over the left heel. The end position is a kneeling windmill, with the spine rotated and the gaze toward the right hand. Difficulties may arise during this stage if the athlete has tight hip flexors or weak gluteal muscles. Active rotation in both shoulders is another important component of this stage.

In Stage Five, the windmill moves upright. The hip extensors and abdominals engage as the torso moves laterally to end in a vertical position. The kettlebell is now overhead. The left hip internally rotates to a parallel position—the athlete is in a lunge position. Active gluteals and a slight posterior tilt help to protect the lumbar spine from hyperextension and destabilization.

The truck is stabilized and prepared for Stage Six, when the gluteals, hamstrings, and quadriceps all engage to bring the athlete into a standing position.

For a total repetition, the athlete reverses each step and returns to a supine position on the floor. The shoulders remain stable and rotate in their socket as the hamstrings, hip extensors, and abdominals perform eccentric contractions.



Jojo's gaze moves to the horizon as he performs Stages Five and Six of the Turkish Get-Up

## CASE STUDY

Beth, age 25, is a lifelong athlete. She played sports throughout high school and was a varsity lacrosse player in college. Beth is fit and strong, but her hours in the weight room have significantly reduced her mobility. Beth has recently discovered kettlebells through a local gym and enjoys their versatility. She appreciates that the Turkish Get-Up is a foundational kettlebell movement, but feels limited by her lack of mobility. She also notes an imbalance from side to side and some shoulder instability.

Beth has heard that Pilates creates balance and enhances both mobility and stability. She is interested in a cross-training program that will compliment her new kettlebell hobby. Beth hopes that Pilates will give her the edge she needs to master the Turkish Get-Up, and allow her to increase her kettlebell weight during the Get-Up. Beth's training goal is to increase her Get-Up load from 12kgs to 24kgs.

On initial evaluation, Beth is obviously very strong, but her hip and shoulder mobility are restricted and her right side is slightly stronger than her left. When evaluating Beth's Turkish Get-Up, difficulty is noted in roll-to-elbow phase (Stage Two) on the left side. Left shoulder instability is observed when she performs both right- and left-sided Get-Ups. Hip extensor weakness is noted on the left side, as Beth appears to struggle during both the sweep (Stage Five) and the lunge-to-standing phase (Stage Six). Limited hip mobility makes the windmill position difficult on both sides and tight latissimus dorsi keep her from bringing the kettlebell directly overhead in Stage Six.

Beth's conditioning plan follows. The notes set forth planned alternatives and progressions to use as Beth's mobility and strength improve:



<p>FULL BODY INTEGR. <i>Cadillac</i></p> <p><i>Reformer</i></p>	<p>Sitting Forward Side Reach</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Long Stretch Up Stretch 3</p>	<p>Practice abdominal control to assist in the reverse phase of the Get-Up, develop pelvic stability for the Sweep in Stage Three, and practice thoracic rotation and mobilize the spine for Stages Two through Five, and stretch the shoulder adductors.</p> <p>Practice scapular and trunk stabilization, particularly in Stages Five and Six. The closed chain mimics Stages Two through Five of the Get-Up.</p>
<p>ARMS <i>Reformer</i></p>	<p><u>Arm Kneeling Side Series:</u> Deltoid Reach Cross Arm Pull Triceps Arms Overhead</p> <p>OR</p> <p><u>Rowing Series</u> Rowing Back 1 Rowing Back 2 Rowing Front 1 Rowing Front 2</p>	<p>Single-arm, open-chain movements develop shoulder, arm and trunk stability, and shoulder internal rotator control necessary during each stage of the Get-Up.</p> <p>Practice performing multi-step, coordinated movements, that require trunk and shoulder stabilization while the arms are in varying, open-chain positions.</p>
<p>F.B.I. (ADV.) <i>Wunda Chair</i></p>	<p>Tendon Stretch</p>	<p>Strengthen abdominals, serratus anterior, and deltoids, and practice scapular stabilization for each stage of the Get-Up. The position of the body in this movement mimics the body's position in Stage Two.</p>
<p>LEGS <i>Wunda Chair</i></p>	<p>Forward Lunge Step Back</p>	<p>Assists in Stages Five and Six by strengthening hip extensors, hip abductors, and knee extensors, and practice control.</p>
<p>LAT. FLEX/ROTATION <i>Wunda Chair</i></p>	<p>Side Pike</p>	<p>Assists in Stages Two and Three by emphasizing oblique strength. Also strengthens the shoulder flexors and requires shoulder stabilization, important throughout the Get-Up.</p>
<p>BACK EXTENSION <i>Cadillac</i></p>	<p>Prone 1 PROGRESSION: Prone 2</p>	<p>Strengthen back extensors to prepare for Stages Three through Six and assist throughout the Get-Up by practicing shoulder extensor and abdominal control. Prone 2 provides a shoulder stretch, which will assist in mobility during Stage Six.</p>

## **CONCLUSION**

The Turkish Get-Up is an age-old, deliberately-paced kettlebell movement incorporating Pilates principles of awareness, balance, concentration, center, control, efficiency, flow, precision, and harmony. It requires trunk and shoulder stability, hip and shoulder mobility, abdominal, quadriceps, hamstring, and gluteal strength, and thoracic extension and rotation. Its six stages mimic many movements in the BASI repertoire, making Pilates an effective cross-training tool for a kettlebell enthusiast seeking to improve her performance of the Turkish Get-Up.

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