



Ever wonder how the dumbbell got its name? Then you've come to the right place

to break the silence, which means that a ringless bell is about as useful as a wingless airplane — unless, of course, you find a useful way to use a useless bell,

which is exactly what athletes in Tudor England did centuries ago.

Back in the 1500s, before gyms, spas or health clubs, some of the only people who worked out were church-bell ringers. Evidently, ringing a church bell on a regular basis required a certain amount of skill and strength. So, like a pitcher throwing between starts, bell ringers would practice on their off-days to hone their talent. A side effect, of course, was annoying the hell out of anyone within earshot.

The solution was to do the unspeakable: remove their bells' balls. In a sick form of mass bell castration, dozens of clappers (the instrument that hits the inside of the bell, making it ring) were cut off, leaving the bell ringers with silent bells. The word used in the 18th century to signify that something was mute, or soundless, was *dumb*, which gives us the word for the 'bells we use today: dumbbells. When athletes saw that the bells came in different weights and could be used to increase muscle size, they started utilizing them as a workout device.

A man named Joseph Addison is credited with using the word dumbbell in print for the first time in *The Spectator* on July 12, 1711. In his article on fitness, he wrote: "...I exercise myself an Hour every Morning upon a dumb Bell that is placed in a Corner of my room... My Landlady and her Daughters are so well acquainted with my Hours of Exercise, that they never come into my Room to disturb me whilst I am ringing."

Somewhere along the line we got lucky because the word "ringing" was replaced by "lifting" in our modern gym lingo. Think about it. Instead of powerlifting, we'd be power ringing. Instead of deadlifting, we'd be dead ringing — and neither of those phrases has the right, well, ring to it. **M&F**

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FOR WHOM THE DUMBBELL TOLLS

Doorbells ring. Cowbells ring. Sleigh bells, dinner bells and church bells ring. Harry Belafonte doesn't ring, but he can sing. "Jingle Bells" rings during the holidays. Farm bells ring during workdays. Bellhops ring handbells, and bell-bottoms rang in the '70s. LL Cool J rocked the bells and AC/DC wrote "Hells Bells." Even *The Bell Jar* caused hand-wringing.

But the 'bells you use the most? Totally mute. You can grunt at them all you want and they barely acknowledge you. You can squeeze them as hard as you can and you won't hear a peep. You can even drop them on the

floor and all you hear is the floor groan. No matter what's done to them, they remain steadfastly silent.

And silence, as we all know, isn't what bells are made for. In fact, they were created to do the exact opposite: