

THE BEGINNER’S GUIDE TO THE

STEEL MACE

PRIMAL TRAINING FOR POWER, STRENGTH, AND BALANCE



By Sean Hyson, C.S.C.S., and the Onnit Academy

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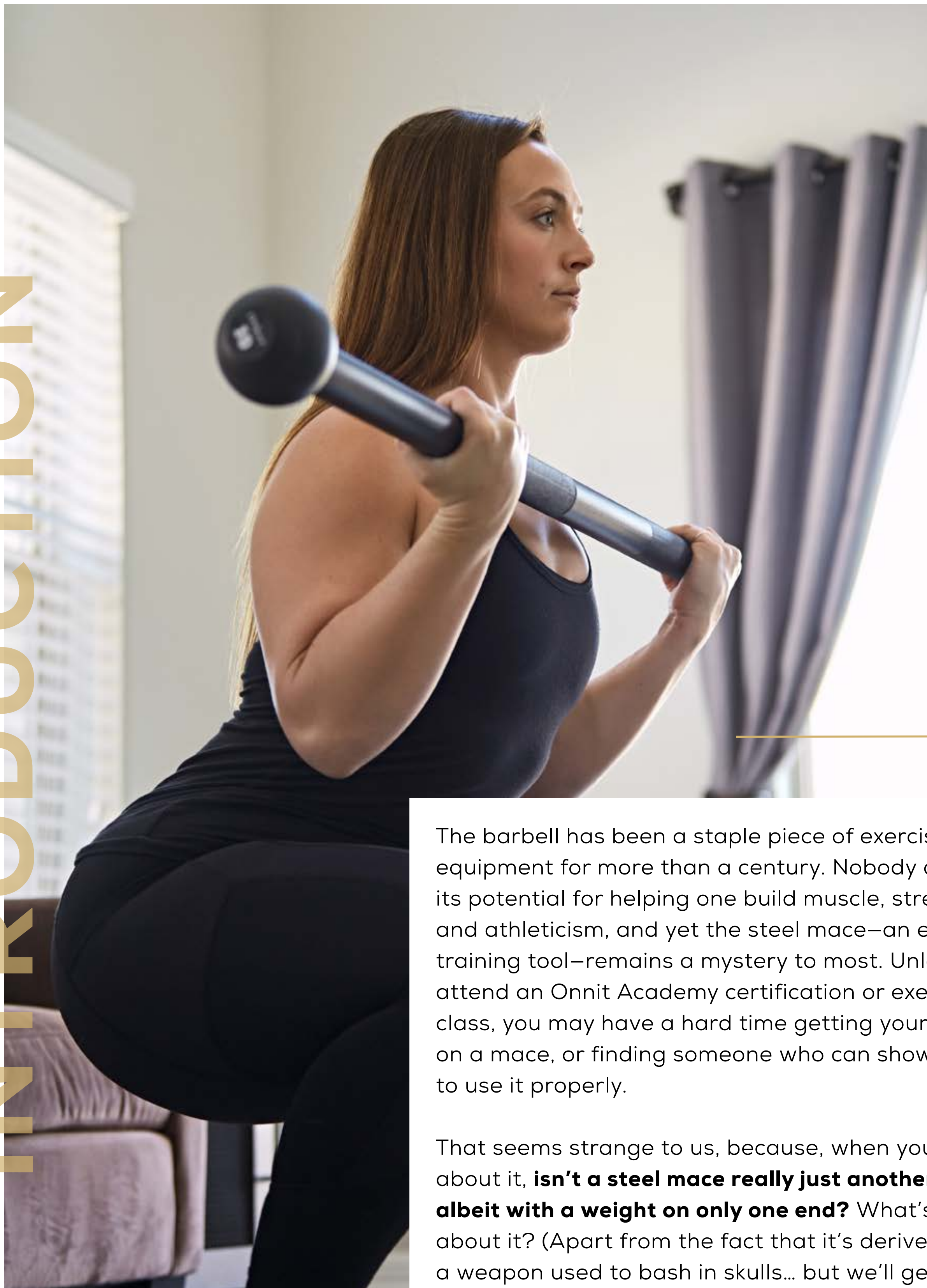
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WHY WORK OUT WITH A STEEL MACE?



The barbell has been a staple piece of exercise equipment for more than a century. Nobody questions its potential for helping one build muscle, strength, and athleticism, and yet the steel mace—an even older training tool—remains a mystery to most. Unless you attend an Onnit Academy certification or exercise class, you may have a hard time getting your hands on a mace, or finding someone who can show you how to use it properly.

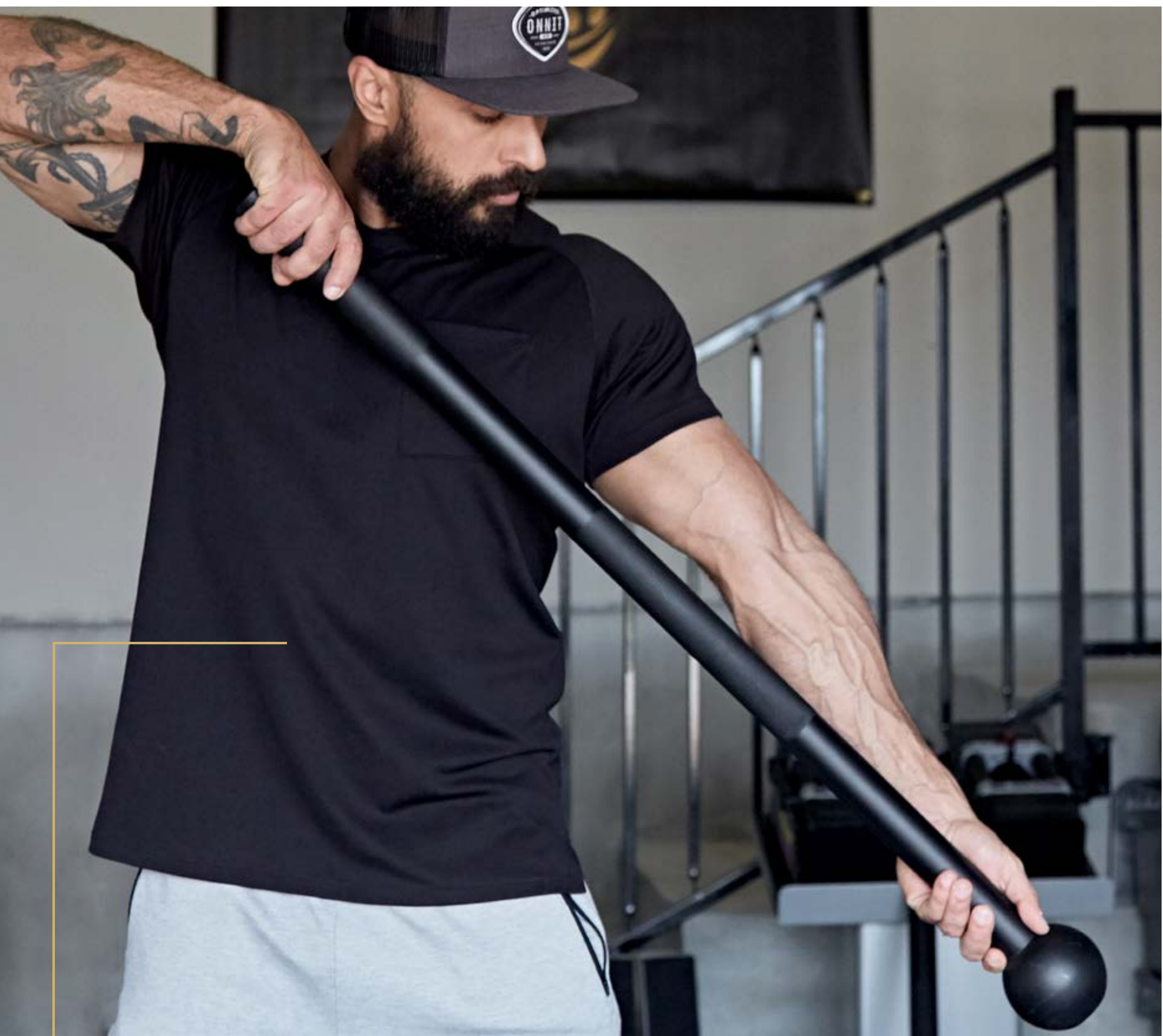
That seems strange to us, because, when you think about it, **isn't a steel mace really just another barbell, albeit with a weight on only one end?** What's so scary about it? (Apart from the fact that it's derived from a weapon used to bash in skulls... but we'll get to that later.) The truth is, you can do everything with a steel mace that you ever learned to do with a barbell, and that's just the beginning.

If you've been curious about steel mace training but don't know where to begin with it, **or feel intimidated by what seems like a medieval bludgeon**, let this book demystify the mace for you. By the end, you'll understand why it's outlasted innumerable fitness innovations and gimmicks alike to remain one of the most effective training implements you can use.

WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH THIS THING?

As you'll discover in this book, the uses for the steel mace are as broad as the wildest imagination. But if you want to know how you can begin using it in your own workouts—starting right now—we suggest you treat it simply as an alternative to the barbell.

Performing classic strength exercises such as the squat, overhead press, Romanian deadlift, and bent-over row with a mace works all the same muscles that the barbell will, but with a bonus (see page 19). The imbalance created by the load of the macehead (the ball at the top of the mace handle) will make it difficult to lift the mace evenly. It wants to pull you out of position, twisting you in the direction of the heavier end, **so you have to work that much harder to keep the path of motion even—calling on your core, grip, and various stabilizer muscles to do so.** Spend a few weeks doing these exercises with the mace and then see how you feel doing them with a regular barbell again. Don't be surprised if you feel more stable and strong, and break strength plateaus shortly thereafter.



You don't even have to work out with the mace, per se, to reap some benefits from it. The long lever that the handle creates makes it fantastic for increasing mobility. If you have tight shoulders and a rounded upper back, for instance, as a result of too much chest training and/or sitting at a desk in front of a computer for too long, try holding the mace behind your head, the macehead pointing to the floor. **Swing it gently side to side to feel the mace gradually pull your shoulders into greater flexion, opening up your chest and stretching your thoracic spine.** Many people find this helps relieve shoulder pain, and warms them up for an upper-body or pressing workout.

Once you've gotten a feel for the steel mace, you can begin to unlock its greatest potential—using it as a tool to train rotation. The fact is, most people's training is limited to the sagittal movement plane. This means exercises where the trunk or limbs move forward and back, as in a bench press, curl, squat, deadlift, and running. Nevertheless, most of the movements we make in sports and everyday life aren't that simple. They're combinations of all three planes of motion—moving forward and back, side to side, and in rotation. With that in mind, doesn't it make sense to train these movements in our workouts?

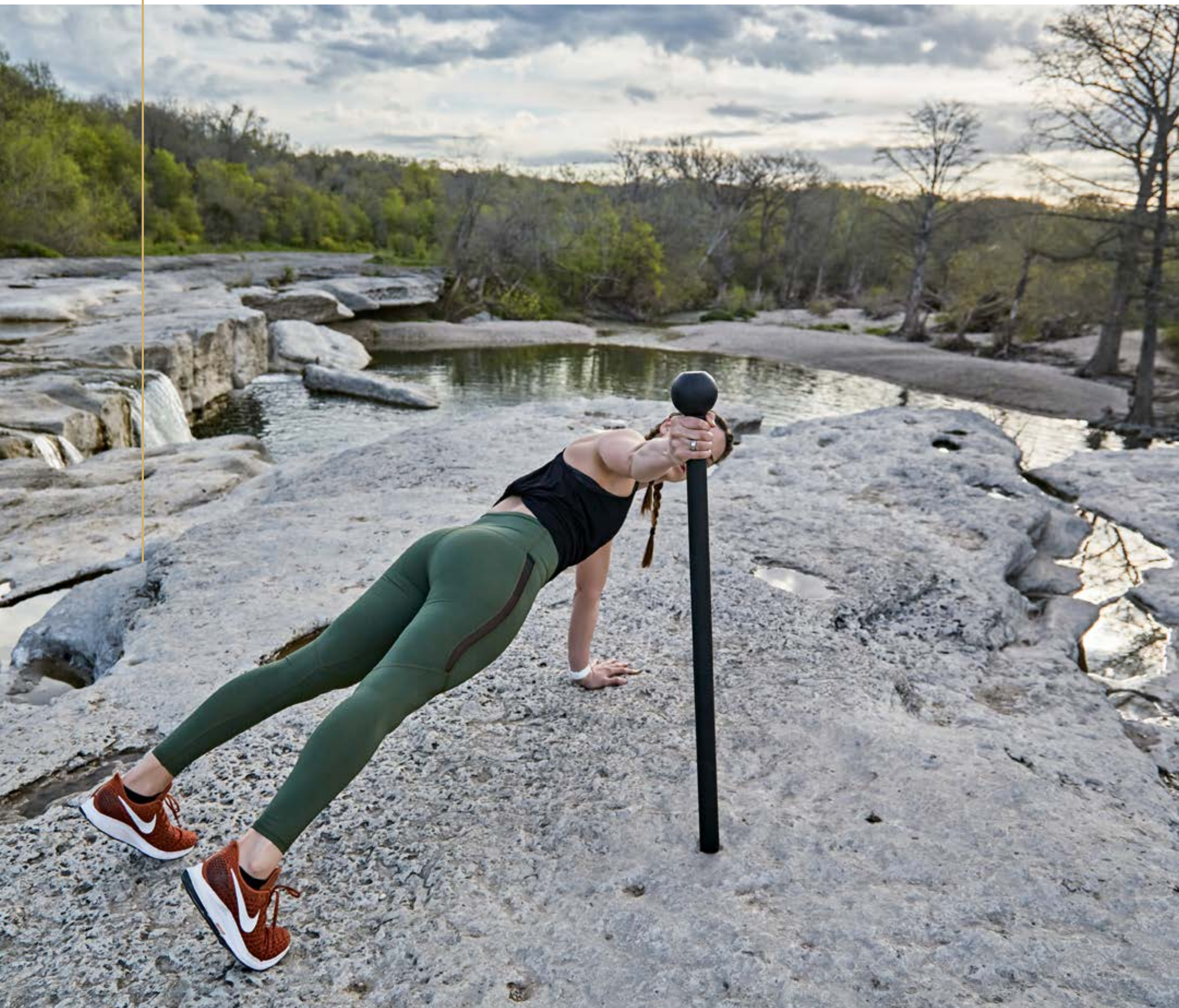
The steel mace facilitates the body's ability to rotate—and resist rotation, when needed—more so than the kettlebell, steel club, or any other training implement.

It lends itself perfectly to performing chopping and paddling motions that make your shoulders, torso, and hips twist—something they can't do as well or as safely with a barbell or other conventional equipment. The length of the mace handle is ultimately designed to be swung. Swinging the mace creates tremendous force—a force that threatens to knock you off balance and out of position unless you learn to control it. **As a result, steel mace training is one of the best ways to instill good posture and movement mechanics.** It trains you to maintain what trainers refer to as the body's structural integrity, so that you can stay stable and in control of how you move no matter what storm you find yourself at the center of, be it running and cutting on a field, fighting an opponent in a cage, shoveling snow out of your driveway, or a million other challenges.



Of course, with greater rotational movement comes greater power. **Knockout punches and kicks, 90-miles per hour fastballs, and 300-yard drives off the tee all depend on your ability to coil and uncoil your body** rapidly and efficiently, and steel mace exercises can simulate the movement mechanics involved in all of the above.

When you're ready, you can advance your training to include an infinite number of more complex moves that are unique to the mace and really take advantage of its rotational potential, such as the 360, barbarian squat, uppercut, and various other techniques you've no doubt seen demonstrated on YouTube (some of which we'll introduce you to in this book). You're even welcome to make up your own exercises, as one of the mace's greatest attributes is its ability to help you express yourself, using it to flow through movements that train your body as well as communicate your passion, not unlike a dance, martial art, or other physical art form.



CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY OF THE STEEL MACE



We won't sugarcoat it: the mace was invented to kill people. But it wasn't long before folks realized that lifting one could help them get into great shape too.

The use of a mace dates back to the days when fitness was a fortuitous byproduct of training for war. More than 2,000 years ago, Hindu soldiers in India wielded maces that were nothing more than bamboo sticks with stones tied to the ends. One of their deities, Hanuman, was a monkey-man hybrid who carried a mace and, as the legend went, could lift the Himalayas with his hands. **Called a "gada," the mace was primarily used to help condition warriors for their combat training,** which included wrestling, archery, and sword fighting.

"If we look back at various martial cultures," says John Wolf, Onnit's Chief Fitness Officer, "they all used some kind of mace." Historical records indicate that different varieties of maces were present in India, and later Russia and Western Europe during the Middle Ages, as each culture experienced a time when the armor of its warriors became more advanced than the weaponry used against it. "The advent of plate armor made slashing swords less effective," says Wolf. "You had to be either really precise and attack the seams in the armor suit, or you had to develop a tool that could overwhelm the armor—something that could just bash it in. And so the steel mace was born."

As anyone who's seen *Braveheart* or *Robin Hood* knows, maces evolved to where they had spikes on the ball end, and helped turn the tide of many a war. But the gentler, more primitive models were never discarded as a tool used off the battlefield to get a great workout. Indian wrestlers continued to popularize the mace, and in the early 20th century, the greatest champion among them was photographed with an ornate mace as a symbol of his strength and durability. **Known as the Great Gama, the 240-pound grappler went undefeated in a career spanning 52 years.**

"Gama was ordained with a mace to show that he was the greatest wrestler of his time," says Wolf. "Royal and ceremonial scepters derive from the mace, as it's come to be seen the world over as a physical representation of power."

With that in mind, how could you **not** train with one?



CHAPTER 2

BENEFITS OF STEEL MACE TRAINING

The steel mace can play as large or as small a role in your training as you like, and it can be applied to achieving virtually any fitness goal. You may choose to use it as an adjunct to barbell and other free-weight training, or let the mace be the sole piece of exercise equipment in your home gym. Here's what you're getting when you pick up a steel mace.



INCREASED STABILITY

Your muscles only do what your central nervous system tells them. The first time you performed a squat, a jiu-jitsu technique, or a dance move, you probably felt strange—wobbly, or out of control. That’s because your nervous system didn’t know how to get your muscles to do it smoothly. As you practiced the movement over and over, your nervous system figured out how to coordinate the actions of your muscles more efficiently, and your performance improved.

Because the handle of the steel mace is so long, **it extends the range at which you need to control all your movements—ultimately, to 360 degrees**, as in the 360 overhead swing (the exercise the mace is probably best known for). Wolf says that this presents a tremendous challenge for your nervous system, which will respond by reorganizing your muscle movements for rock-solid stability.

To illustrate this, imagine doing a squat while holding a kettlebell or dumbbell in front of your chest (a goblet squat). The weight will pull you forward if you let it, so you have to concentrate on keeping your torso upright and sitting back into your squat, which will better activate your glutes and hamstrings. Now picture doing an overhead squat—performing the same squatting motion while holding weights or a bar with arms extended overhead. The lever of your extended arms is longer, so the movement is harder to control. To keep your arms and torso from swaying to and fro, you need to engage your core and upper back muscles more.

Finally, think about holding a steel mace from the bottom of the handle, and swinging it down in front of your chest as you squat, and then up overhead as you rise (a barbarian squat). The mace—particularly the load on the end of it—is far away from your center of gravity, and moving dynamically the whole time. **Your entire body has to maintain alignment and muscular tension to prevent you from toppling over** throughout the range of motion. “The amount of data your nervous system processes is greater with the mace,” says Wolf. And that helps build an unbreakable and highly athletic body.



IMPROVED MOVEMENT SKILLS

With this greater neural activation will come the ability to move better overall. If years of sagittal plane-only training has led you to run, shuffle, and turn like a clunky robot when you play sports, the mace can help get you moving more like a jungle panther. Leo Savage, one of the world's foremost steel mace coaches (steelmaceflow.com), points out that the mace is particularly useful for doing flows—different movements that are linked together fluidly to test movement proficiency. You've no doubt seen bodyweight (such as Animal Flow™) and kettlebell flows (follow Onnit kettlebell coach [@primal.swoledier](https://www.instagram.com/primal.swoledier) on Instagram) that challenge strength, mobility, and endurance simultaneously; steel mace flows up the ante even further.

"I like to have people do one steel mace move on the left side and then immediately perform a different one on the right side," says Savage. For instance, a ballistic curl (see page 37) followed by a 360 (page 44). **"Your weaker side can't just follow the stronger side. Your brain has to reset itself** to perform a different exercise each time you switch sides. This activates the nervous system to a greater degree," and eventually paves the way for your training to look more like a performance than a workout. Those freaks you see on social media posting crazy mace flows that look like some kind of tribal war dance? This is how they got there.



FUNCTIONAL STRENGTH

One of the great features that most of the Onnit Academy unconventional fitness tools share is an offset load. The kettlebell, sandbag, and steel club are all distinguished by the fact that the bulk of their weight is at a distance from the handle, which makes them more difficult to stabilize and control when you lift them. **The steel mace provides the greatest degree of offset loading** out of all of these implements. As a result, the demand it places on your core and grip alone is unmatched.

Wolf points out that we don't live in a symmetrical world. Many times in life and in sports, you'll need to exert force on something that isn't balanced. Training for that unevenness is crucial. "With conventional strength training, it's easy to get overconfident in thinking you know what strength is," says Wolf. "We ask each other, 'What do you bench?', to appraise somebody's upper-body strength. **But I can take the same strong guys who kill it on the bench press and hand them a steel mace, and all of a sudden they can't control their bodies in space.** The tiny ball on the end of the mace pushes them around. It's kind of funny."

Due to the imbalance built into the steel mace design, it forces you to train unilaterally—one side at a time. If you just did a set with the macehead pointing to the left side, you know you have to do your next one with it pointing to the right. People who have neglected single-leg and arm work (such as lunges, one-arm rows, etc.) and have developed a weaker side as a result will find that the steel mace helps restore muscle balance.

Wolf explains that there's a metaphor in steel mace training. "As a weapon, the mace was used to overwhelm heavy armor," he says, "which showed its limitations in being able to protect a warrior. The way we use the mace today, as a training implement, it's a means of exposing weak links in our own armor—our muscle and strength. When you use the mace, it will expose the weakest links in your kinetic chain and force you to address them."



BETTER ROTATIONAL MOVEMENT

There's a saying among trainers that "dysfunction hides in rotation." Most people can do a basic single-plane press or squat exercise without too much trouble on their first day of training, but even experienced athletes have difficulty keeping form when you add a rotational component to their exercise. Picture doing a basic lunge versus a lunge where you twist your torso as far as you can in the direction of your forward leg. Which one do you think is going to be harder to do without your legs wobbling, your rear knee touching the floor, or your torso bending to one side?

Wolf says that **the first step toward developing better rotation is to learn how to avoid rotation when it's not wanted**, and you can do that by simply treating the mace as a barbell and performing classic, conventional lifts with it. "If we can do a squat, press, or row while making the mace look as if it's evenly loaded," says Wolf, "we're actually subjecting the body to a ton of rotational stress—even if we're not actually rotating." Avoiding letting the mace twist or bend you when you do these moves will make it harder for other forces to do the same to you out in the real world (be it opponents in sports competition, or heavy furniture you need to carry upstairs).

"When your nervous system senses that you're stable," Wolf says, "it allows you more range of motion," and that includes in rotational movements. In other words, **if you want to be able to turn better, first work on not letting things turn you.**

When you do graduate to performing rotational and swinging exercises with the mace, you'll find there's no better tool for them. As versatile as a kettlebell is, you can really only swing it front to back and side to side, and while the steel club functions as a sort of miniature mace, it doesn't allow the different grip positions that the steel mace does, which provide greater training variety—so the mace stands alone for multi-purpose rotational training.



FUN!

If you're the kind of person that just can't get excited about going to the gym and lifting weights from point A to point B, the mace might be the thing that finally motivates you to work out. Wolf says there's a primal rush you get from lifting the mace overhead that has to be experienced to be understood. Because of its origins as a weapon, it makes you feel like a warrior when you use it. Curling a barbell? Not so much.

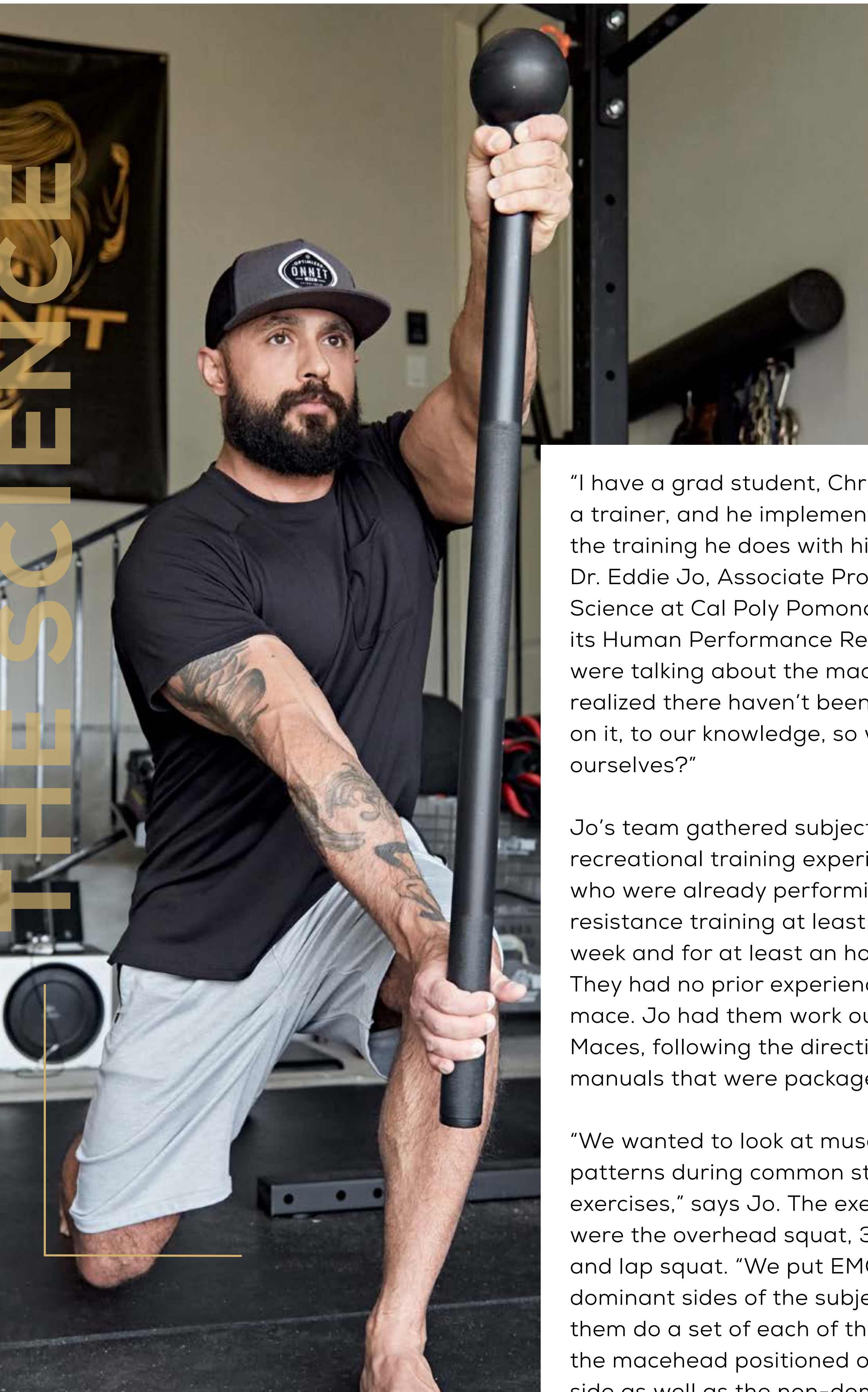
"I think part of the appeal is that you can feel the applications the steel mace has immediately," says Wolf. "Whether or not we feel removed from our history as a tribal people who fought wars, there's an innate knowledge of how to use tools like the mace that's still in us. The steel mace can help you tap into that, even if it's just to get in better shape."

Savage adds that, once he's taught his students the foundational steel mace movements, he welcomes them to make up their own. Unlike Olympic weightlifting or powerlifting, which has very specific movements you must perform to be successful, steel mace training is much more vibrant and is always evolving. **"My students come to me wanting to learn steel mace flows more for their own mental health than anything physical,"** says Savage. "Mace training becomes a way to express yourself that's safe and playful. It can be healing."



THE SCIENCE OF STEEL MACE

It's a little ironic that the mace is one of the oldest fitness tools on earth and yet remains among the least studied. Fortunately, that may be changing, as researchers at California State University recently conducted a trial using one of Onnit's steel maces. (Onnit did not suggest, commission, or support the study in any way—the researchers acted entirely on their own.)



"I have a grad student, Christian Ison, who's a trainer, and he implements the mace in the training he does with his clients," says Dr. Eddie Jo, Associate Professor of Exercise Science at Cal Poly Pomona, and director of its Human Performance Research Lab. "We were talking about the mace one day and realized there haven't been any studies done on it, to our knowledge, so why not do one ourselves?"

Jo's team gathered subjects who had recreational training experience—people who were already performing some kind of resistance training at least three days per week and for at least an hour per session. They had no prior experience using the steel mace. Jo had them work out with Onnit Steel Maces, following the directions provided in the manuals that were packaged with them.

"We wanted to look at muscle activation patterns during common steel mace exercises," says Jo. The exercises chosen were the overhead squat, 360, reverse lunge, and lap squat. "We put EMG sensors on the dominant sides of the subjects, and we had them do a set of each of those exercises with the macehead positioned on the dominant side as well as the non-dominant side to see how the dominant side muscles reacted."



Unsurprisingly, the muscles on the dominant side (for instance, the quads, traps, deltoids, pecs, and triceps during the overhead squat) showed greater activity when the lift was done with the macehead on that side (i.e., pointing to the right on a right-handed person). “But what was interesting,” says Jo, “was when we looked at the oblique and core muscles. The activation of those muscles was greatest when the macehead was held on the opposite side. **So if you’re doing the lap squat and the macehead is pointing left, the right obliques will fire harder.** It shows that the mace gives you a very unique muscle activation pattern compared to normal barbell exercises, so this could introduce a whole new type of stimulus for your muscles to adapt to.”

Jo adds that being able to work one side of the body and then transition to the other side by simply flipping the orientation of the mace makes the training effect unique as well as convenient. “Your ability to shift core activation is very dynamic and fluid with the mace,” he says. “You can also accomplish more than one type of movement in a single set if you want to, going from a lunge into a lap squat and then an overhead squat, for example.”

More studies need to be done to determine what the long-term benefits of steel mace training can be, but Jo speculates that the mace has great application to sports training. “In life and in sports, when you’re jumping, you’re usually turning also. With the steel mace, you can produce those same multi-planar movements, but with increased resistance. That helps athletes develop power, and should carry over to the playing field—as well as have benefits for general fitness.”

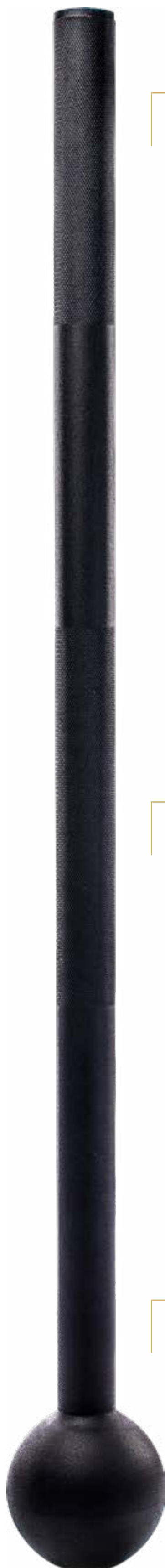
Beyond the physical advantages of steel mace training, Jo noticed some mental ones too, explaining that the subjects said they “loved using the mace,” and that the offset weight helped them to focus on their form more. “They reported feeling sore the next day, too,” says Jo, “saying that they felt they had gotten a good workout.”

Jo expects this study to be published in summer 2019, after his grad student and lead investigator, Christian Ison, presents it at the National Strength and Conditioning Association’s annual conference in July.

CHAPTER 3

STEEL MACE BUYING GUIDE

So you're ready to buy a steel mace. Congratulations! But before you plunk down your hard-earned funds on another piece of exercise equipment—or try to sand the spikes off a medieval antique—make sure you know what kind of mace is best for you. Consider the following.



THE HANDLE

The bigger your hands, the bigger your mace handle should be. The smallest mace Onnit sells is a seven-pounder, which offers a 30.5-inch long handle. Most women find this model to be appropriate to start. On the other end of the spectrum, our 25-pound mace has a 40.5-inch handle, which is really only for advanced mace wielders.

Remember that steel mace training is humbling. Even a big, strong guy won't be able to start out with a 25-pound mace for most exercises. And (as most women will tell you) longer isn't necessarily better. A longer mace is harder to control and puts more stress on your body, so start small.

THE FEEL

A mace that's too slick can fly right out of your hands when you get sweaty. Meanwhile, one that's too tacky can pull the skin off your palms. You want a mace that provides some friction but still allows your hands to glide up and down the handle. Onnit maces feature knurling, like a barbell, and a powder coating for a no-slip grip.

THE WEIGHT

Onnit makes maces that weigh 7, 10, 15, 20, and 25 pounds. Most women start with the 7 or 10-pounder, and most men can handle the 10 or 15. For some mace exercises, a lighter weight will serve you better, while other moves can be loaded up more, so you should consider buying two weight increments at once.

PICK UP AN ONNIT STEEL MACE [HERE](#)

CHAPTER 4

BEGINNER STEEL MACE MOVES

“The best way to learn something foreign,” says Wolf, “is to do things that are as familiar as possible.” With that in mind, you’ll gain mastery of the steel mace faster if you start using it like a tool you no doubt already know well—the barbell.

The following are movements that Wolf says will build the stability and positional awareness you’ll need to handle fancier (and flashier) steel mace exercises down the road. You can add one or more at a time into the workouts you’re already doing, or do them all in a single session as a standalone workout. **Perform 3–5 sets of 5 reps (on each side) for each exercise.**

Perform your reps using a tempo of 3-3-3-3. That is, take three seconds to lower the weight on each rep (the eccentric, or negative portion), hold the bottom position under control for three seconds, and then take three seconds to lift the weight (the concentric, or positive part of the rep). Finally, hold the top position for three seconds. Performing your reps slowly and with maximum control will build the strength you need to maintain stability when the mace starts flying!

“Avoid going to failure on any set,” says Wolf. Choose a light mace—10–15 pounds for men, 7–10 pounds for women—and focus on form. Your goal is to keep the mace moving evenly and parallel to the floor throughout each rep.



OVERHEAD PRESS

1



STEP 1

Stand with feet at shoulder width. Hold the mace with an overhand grip at shoulder level, your hands shoulder-width apart. Draw your shoulder blades together and downward—think “proud chest.”

2



STEP 2

Squeeze the mace handle and actively push outward with your hands as if you were trying to pull the mace apart like a piece of taffy—you’ll feel your upper back and shoulders activate. Tuck your tailbone under slightly so that your pelvis is parallel to the floor and pull your ribs down. Take a deep breath and brace your core.

3



STEP 3

Take 3 seconds to press the mace overhead so that it lines up with the back of your head at the lockout position. (Do not allow your ribs to flare or your lower back to hyperextend—keep your core tight.) Hold the lockout for 3 seconds, and then take 3 seconds to lower the mace back to shoulder level. Hold the bottom position 3 seconds. Complete your reps on that side and then switch sides.

FRONT SQUAT

STEP 1

Hold the mace as you did for the overhead press. Twist your feet into the floor—imagine you’re standing on grass and you’re trying to twist it up underneath you. Don’t let your feet change position, but let the twisting action activate your hips. You should feel your glutes tighten. Keep the same tight grip on the mace as you did with the overhead press, as well as the same pelvis position and proud chest.

1



2



STEP 2

Take a deep breath, brace your core, and lower your body into a squat. Take 3 seconds to go down. Go as low as you can while keeping your head, spine, and pelvis in a straight line. Keep the tension in your hips and push your knees apart as you sink down. Hold the bottom for 3 seconds.

3

STEP 3

Take 3 seconds to extend your hips and continue driving your knees out to stand back up. Hold the top position 3 seconds. Complete your reps on that side and then switch sides.



1



STEP 1

Hold the mace at about hip level with a shoulder-width grip and plant your feet hip-width apart. Pull the mace apart as you did in the overhead press. Keep your pelvis parallel to the floor and your chest proud as well.

STEP 2

Take a deep breath and brace your core. Push your hips backward and, maintaining a long spine from your head to your pelvis, lower your body until you feel a stretch in your hamstrings and your arms are extended toward the floor. Allow your knees to bend as needed.

2



3



STEP 3

Take 3 seconds to pull the mace into your body until it touches your belly button. Hold 3 seconds, and then take 3 seconds to lower the mace to the arms-extended position again. Hold the extended position 3 seconds. Complete your reps on that side and then switch sides.

1

STEP 1

Hold the mace at about hip level with a shoulder-width grip and plant your feet hip-width apart. Your chest should be proud, your pelvis tucked, core engaged, and hands putting tension on the mace.



2



STEP 2

Bend your hips back, allowing your knees to bend as well, until the mace is just above knee level. Take 3 seconds to extend your hips and knees while simultaneously pulling the mace up to shoulder level. Flare your elbows out 90 degrees and stand tall. Hold this position 3 seconds.

3

STEP 3

Take 3 seconds to rotate your elbows under the mace so they're pointing to the floor and your forearms are vertical. Keep your upper back contracted, shoulder blades drawing together and down, and hold for 3 seconds. Take 3 seconds to lower your elbows again and another 3 to bend your hips back until the mace is above your knees. Complete your reps on that side and then switch sides.



CHAPTER 5

BEGINNER STEEL MACE WORKOUT PROGRAM

The following routines, designed by Equinox Tier X Coach and Onnit Steel Mace educator Nikita Fear ([@nikitafear](#) on Instagram), will get you familiar with using the mace to resist rotation, and introduce rotation to conventional movements that you probably already know. The primary goal of these workouts is to build your comfort level with the mace and develop stability in your shoulders, hips, and core, but they're full-body sessions that will also help you build muscle and boost your metabolism—so don't be disappointed if you get leaner and stronger too.

Fear offers these tips for keeping form: "If the move you're doing has the mace vertical, it should be parallel to your spine," she says. "If the mace is horizontal, it should be level with the floor."

DIRECTIONS

Perform each workout once per week on non-consecutive days. **So you could do Workout A on Monday, B on Wednesday, and C on Friday.** Repeat the workouts for four to six weeks. You're welcome to do aerobic or HIIT cardio the same days that you train with the steel mace, or on the days in between, but don't perform any additional weight training.

Perform the exercises marked with a letter (A, B, and C) as a circuit. **So you'll do one set of A, then one set of B, and then C before resting.** Rest as needed afterward, and then repeat the circuit for three total rounds.

You can use the same mace in each workout. Men should choose a 10–15-pound mace, and women a 7–10-pounder. To make any exercise more challenging, move your grip further away from the macehead. To make it easier, move your hands closer to the macehead.

Begin each workout with at least five minutes of warmup that includes [mobility](#) training. End each workout with stretching and decompression.

WORKOUT A

There are two different circuits in this workout. Complete your rounds for all the exercises in the first one, and then go on to the second.

CIRCUIT 1

1A. FRONT SQUAT, REPS: 10 (each side)

1B. HIGH-HINGE EVEN ROW, REPS: 10 (each side)

1C. OVERHEAD CARRY, REPS: Carry for 30-45 seconds

CIRCUIT 2

1A. OVERHEAD PRESS, REPS: 10 (each side)

1B. SINGLE SIDE PRESS FROM VERTICAL FRONT, REPS: 10 (each side)

1C. EVEN CURL WALK, REPS: Carry for 30-45 seconds



1A. FRONT SQUAT

REPS: 10 (each side)

1



STEP 1

Hold the mace at shoulder level with hands shoulder-width apart and forearms vertical. Twist your feet into the floor—imagine you’re standing on grass and you’re trying to twist it up underneath you. Don’t let your feet change position, but let the twisting action activate your hips. You should feel your glutes tighten. Squeeze the mace and try to pull it apart, so you feel your upper back muscles activate. Draw your shoulder blades together and downward—think: “proud chest.” Tuck your pelvis under slightly so it’s parallel to the floor and brace your core, pulling your ribs down.

STEP 2

Take a deep breath and lower your body into a squat. Go as low as you can while keeping your head, spine, and pelvis in a straight line. Keep the tension in your hips and push your knees apart as you sink down.

2



3



STEP 3

Extend your hips and continue driving your knees out to stand back up. Complete your reps on that side and then switch sides and repeat.

1B. HIGH-HINGE EVEN ROW
REPS: 10 (each side)

STEP 1

Hold the mace at about hip level with a shoulder-width grip and plant your feet hip-width apart. Pull the mace apart and keep your pelvis parallel to the floor and your chest proud.

1



2



STEP 2

Take a deep breath and brace your core. Push your hips backward and, maintaining a long spine from your head to your pelvis, lower your body until you feel a stretch in your hamstrings and your arms are extended toward the floor. Allow your knees to bend as needed.

3

STEP 3

Pull the bar into your body until it touches your belly button. Lower the mace to the arms-extended position again. Complete your reps on that side and then switch sides and repeat.



1C. OVERHEAD CARRY CARRY FOR 30-45 seconds

1



STEP 1

Set up as you did for the front squat, but adjust your grip so that most of the length of the mace is pointing to the right—your left hand should be gripping the bottom of the handle. Keeping your ribs pulled down, press the mace overhead. Raise your left knee to 90 degrees and take a big step forward. Maintain your shoulder and pelvic position as you move.

2



STEP 2

Continue walking forward at whatever pace you need to maintain stability and control of the mace. Don't let your core disengage or tilt your torso in any direction. Go for 30–45 seconds; switch sides on the next round. You'll work one side twice the first time you do the workout, so make sure you work the other side twice the next time you do it.

REPEAT THIS CIRCUIT FOR 3 TOTAL ROUNDS BEFORE MOVING ON TO CIRCUIT 2.

1



STEP 1

Set up as you did for the front squat. Take a deep breath and brace your core.

2



STEP 2

Press the mace overhead so that it lines up with the back of your head at the lockout position. Do not allow your ribs to flare or your lower back to hyperextend—keep your core tight. Complete your reps on that side and then switch sides and repeat.

3



2B. SINGLE SIDE PRESS
FROM VERTICAL FRONT
REPS: 10 (each side)

STEP 1

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and hold the mace just under the macehead. Bend your arm 90 degrees and draw your shoulders back and down (proud chest).

1



2



STEP 2

Rotate your arm out 90 degrees while keeping your elbow close to your side.

3



STEP 3

Press the mace out to your side without losing your shoulder or pelvic position. Complete your reps on that side, and then switch sides and repeat.

2C. EVEN CURL WALK
CARRY FOR 30-45 seconds

1



STEP 1

Stand tall with your chest proud and pelvis level. Hold the mace with hands shoulder-width apart and your left hand at the bottom end of the handle. Curl the mace as if it were a barbell and hold the top position, actively pulling your shoulders back and down.

2



STEP 2

Walk forward at whatever pace you need to maintain stability and control of the mace. Don't let your core disengage or tilt your torso in any direction. Go for 30-45 seconds; switch sides on the next round. You'll work one side twice the first time you do the workout, so make sure you work the other side twice the next time you do it.

REPEAT THIS CIRCUIT FOR 3 TOTAL ROUNDS.
THIS COMPLETES WORKOUT A.

WORKOUT B

Complete three total rounds of the circuit, then do the ballistic curl as an EMOM (explained below) by itself at the end of the workout for 6–8 minutes.

CIRCUIT

- 1A. SIDE-LOAD REVERSE LUNGE, REPS: 10 (each side)
- 1B. SPLIT-STANCE COUNTER SIDE ROW, REPS: 10 (each side)
- 1C. SINGLE-LEG GLUTE BRIDGE, REPS: 10 (each side)
- 1D. QUADRUPED ALTERNATING LIMB LIFT, REPS: Alternate limbs for 30 seconds

EMOM

BALLISTIC CURL, REPS: 10 each arm for a 6–8 EMOM

Start a stopwatch. At the start of the first minute, begin your set. Complete 10 reps (each side) and then rest for the remainder of that minute. At the start of the next minute, begin your next set (and so on until time is up).



1



1A. SIDE-LOAD REVERSE LUNGE

REPS: 10 (each side)

STEP 1

Stand tall with your chest proud and pelvis level. Hold the mace at arms' length with hands wide—use the full length of the mace. Actively pull the mace into the front of your hips.

STEP 2

Twist your arms to the right so that the macehead points behind you, but try to keep your torso facing front.

2



3



STEP 3

Step back with your left leg and lower your body until that knee nearly touches the floor. Return your left leg to standing. Complete your reps on that side, and then switch sides and repeat.

1B. SPLIT-STANCE COUNTER SIDE ROW

REPS: 10 (each side)

STEP 1

Stand as you did for the side-load reverse lunge, but gripping the mace with hands at shoulder width. Twist your arms to the right so that the macehead points behind you.

1



2



STEP 2

Bend your hips back and step back with your left leg to balance on the ball of your foot. Keep a long spine so that your torso ends up at 45 degrees. The mace should stay in line with your right leg..

3



STEP 3

Row the top end of the mace to your side. Complete your reps on that side, and then switch sides and repeat.

1



STEP 1

Lie on your back on the floor with your heels close to your butt and arms at your sides.

STEP 2

Raise your left foot off the floor and up until your hip and knee are bent 90 degrees. Tuck your pelvis under until it's perpendicular to the floor and brace your core.

2



3



STEP 3

Push through your right heel to raise your hips off the floor. Your body should form a straight line from your shoulders to your right knee. Keep your core tight so that your lower back doesn't hyperextend at the top. Complete your reps on that side, and then switch sides and repeat.

1D. QUADRUPED
ALTERNATING LIMB LIFT
REPS: Alternate limbs for
30 seconds

STEP 1

Get on all fours on the floor. Find your proud chest position and get your pelvis perpendicular to the floor. Brace your core. Dig your toes into the floor to raise your knees into the air.

1



2



STEP 2

Raise your right hand a few inches off the floor. Fight to keep your body alignment. Don't twist.

3



STEP 3

Place your right hand back on the floor and raise your left. Repeat with your right and left knees.

REPEAT THIS CIRCUIT FOR THREE
TOTAL ROUNDS BEFORE MOVING ON
TO THE BALLISTIC CURL.

2. BALLISTIC CURL
REPS: 10 each arm for a 6–8 minute
EMOM

STEP 1
Stand tall with a proud chest and level pelvis. Hold the mace at its ends and point the macehead to the floor with your right hand while your left holds the bottom of the handle above shoulder level.

1



2



STEP 2
Curl the macehead up while you extend your left arm, so you reverse the orientation of the mace.

3



STEP 3
Tilt the macehead to face upward and slide your left hand up to it so that your hands meet, holding the mace vertically in front of your body.

4



STEP 4
Continue tilting the mace so that the macehead now points out to the left side and your right hand slides down to steady it at the bottom. That’s one rep. The entire move should be fluid—think about simply flipping the mace back and forth between your hands. Go slowly at first and gradually increase your speed over subsequent workouts.

THIS COMPLETES WORKOUT B.

WORKOUT C

Perform the circuit for 20 minutes, completing as many rounds as possible in that time. In subsequent workouts, try to increase the number of rounds within the same 20 minutes.

CIRCUIT

1A. UPPER CUT EXTENDED PRESS, REPS: 5 (each side)

1B. LAP-LATERAL SPLIT SQUAT, REPS: 10 (each side)

1C. MODIFIED SUMO SQUAT w/ FRONT PRESS, REPS: 10 (each side)

1D. HIGH-HINGE EVEN ROW, REPS: 10 (each side)



1A. UPPERCUT
EXTENDED PRESS
REPS: 5 (each side)

STEP 1

Stand tall with a proud chest and level pelvis. Hold the mace at its ends and twist your arms to the right side so that the macehead points behind you.

1



2



STEP 2

Raise the bottom of the mace back up and over your left shoulder, as if you were drawing a sword.

3



STEP 3

Continue drawing your left arm behind your body and push your right arm in front of your chest. Maintain your forward-facing posture.

4



STEP 4

Press the macehead overhead with your right arm. Complete your reps on that side, and then switch sides and repeat.

1B. LAP-LATERAL
SPLIT SQUAT
REPS: 10 (each side)

1



STEP 1

Hold the mace with an over-under grip, your right hand gripping the bottom of the handle and facing down while your left grips under the macehead with palm up. Pull the mace apart, and into your belly. Proud chest, level pelvis.

2



STEP 2

Step laterally with your right leg and land with your foot facing forward. Sink into a lunge, ideally to where your right knee is bent 90 degrees (but only go as far as you feel you can control). Keep the mace even in your hands and parallel to the floor. Complete your reps on that side, and then switch sides and repeat.

1C. MODIFIED SUMO SQUAT
W/ FRONT PRESS
REPS: 10 (each side)

STEP 1

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and toes turned out beyond 45 degrees (if you're a dancer, picture a plié). Hold the mace in front of your chest with hands about a foot apart—chest proud and pelvis parallel.

1



2



STEP 2

Squat down while keeping your torso as vertical as possible. Drive your knees out as far as you can as you descend (they should be in line with your toes). Go as deeply as possible but stop when you feel your pelvis is about to untuck.

3



STEP 3

At the bottom of your squat, press the mace out in front of you without losing your proud chest position. Switch the hand that's on top on the next set.

1



1D. HIGH-HINGE EVEN ROW REPS: 10 (each side)

STEP 1

Hold the mace at about hip level with a shoulder-width grip and plant your feet hip-width apart. Pull the mace apart and keep your pelvis parallel to the floor and your chest proud.

STEP 2

Take a deep breath and brace your core. Push your hips backward and, maintaining a long spine from your head to your pelvis, lower your body until you feel a stretch in your hamstrings and your arms are extended toward the floor. Allow your knees to bend as needed.

2



3



STEP 3

Pull the mace into your body until it touches your belly button. Lower the mace to the arms-extended position again. Complete your reps on that side and then switch sides and repeat.

REPEAT THIS CIRCUIT FOR AS MANY ROUNDS AS POSSIBLE IN 20 MINUTES. THIS COMPLETES WORKOUT C.

CHAPTER 6

ADVANCED STEEL MACE MOVES

Once you've mastered the basic steel mace exercises and completed a few workouts with them, you may feel ready to progress to some of the more complex, flashier moves that have gotten the steel mace so much attention on the Internet. The following are a few exercises that you can experiment with, but take it slow. Do sets of five reps or fewer to start, working them into your existing workouts where appropriate.



1

**STEP 1**

Stand with a proud chest and pelvis parallel to the floor. Brace your core. Hold the mace in front of your body from the bottom of the handle, your right hand just above your left. Balance the mace so that it feels almost weightless while it's vertical.

2

**STEP 2**

Tilt the mace over your left shoulder and then reach your arms overhead and behind you, tracing a big circle. Point your elbows overhead when the macehead is facing down.

3

**STEP 3**

Allow the momentum of the mace to help you finish the circle, bringing the mace right side up again in front of you.

ARCHER PRESS W/ CURTSY SQUAT

STEP 1

Hold the mace under the macehead with your left hand above your left shoulder, palm facing up. Steady it with your right hand at the bottom of the handle, palm facing down.

1



2



STEP 2

Step your right foot behind your left as you begin pressing your left arm out and drawing your right arm back.

3

STEP 3

Lower into a lunge with your left leg bent 90 degrees and right knee just above the floor. Your arms should be level with the floor, right elbow pointing right and left elbow locked out.



1

**STEP 1**

Stand with a proud chest and your pelvis parallel to the floor. Hold the mace with hands at shoulder width, your left hand at the bottom of the handle so that the macehead sticks out far to the right side.

2

**STEP 2**

Hinge your hips back while keeping a long spine, so that your torso bends to almost parallel to the floor.

3

**STEP 3**

Row the mace to your belly, and then rotate your torso to the right, extending your left arm while drawing your right arm back further. Keep your proud chest position and avoid arching your lower back.

PADDLESWING

1

STEP 1

Stand heel to toe with feet hip-width apart. Set a proud chest and level your pelvis with the floor. Hold the mace at its ends and twist your arms so that the mace is to the outside of your right leg. Raise your right heel off the floor. Bend your hips back as you swing the mace backward.



2

**STEP 2**

Extend your hips and raise your left arm while pushing your right forward so that you hold the mace diagonally in front of your chest.

3

STEP 3

Extend your right arm overhead while drawing the left one back to complete the swing.



ROTATED PLANK

1



STEP 1

Get into a pushup position with feet outside shoulder width and your right hand balancing on the mace on the floor. Grip the mace just under the macehead.

2



STEP 2

Keeping your right arm straight, rotate your torso to the right as you raise the mace off the floor.

3



STEP 3

Continue until the macehead points straight up in the air and the bottom of the handle rests on the floor.

FOR MORE STEEL MACE EXERCISES AND WORKOUTS, SEE
OUR ONNIT 6 STEEL MACE PROGRAM. A SIX-WEEK FITNESS
PLAN DESIGNED TO MAKE YOU UNBREAKABLE.

A woman with dark hair in a braid, wearing a black tank top, is holding a black steel mace. She is looking off to the side with a focused expression. The background is a solid dark green. The lighting is dramatic, with a warm yellow light source from the left illuminating her face and arm.

ONNIT 6

STEEL MACE

[LEARN MORE](#)

STEEL MACE FAQs

WHY SHOULD I CHOOSE THE STEEL MACE OVER THE STEEL CLUB, OR ANOTHER OFFSET-WEIGHT TOOL?

All offset-weight equipment has its advantages, but if your past training experience has revolved around the use of a barbell, the steel mace will probably feel like less of a departure for you than other tools, and you'll be able to learn its exercises more quickly. **The steel mace can also be more comfortable to use.** If your form isn't on point, a kettlebell can smack the back of your forearm or wrist. Certain kettlebell exercises also require you to hold the bell up against your body or rest it there momentarily, and some people find that uncomfortable.

When compared to the steel club, the mace offers more grip variations and therefore more control. With a club, your hands will always need to be close together, but the mace gives you the option to start with a wide grip to reduce the torque when you're lifting or swinging it. You can bring your hands closer together to increase the difficulty as you get stronger.

I ALREADY HAVE A SLEDGEHAMMER IN MY GARAGE. DO I NEED A STEEL MACE?

We wouldn't suggest you use the steel mace to tear down drywall in your house, but for everything fitness-related, it's a better choice. Here's why:

- The spherical head of the steel mace makes for smoother, more balanced swinging. The clunky head of a sledgehammer is much harder to control.
- The steel mace is available in a range of weight increments, allowing you to progressively overload your muscles. Most sledgehammers are 10–20 pounds.
- Typically, **the handle on the steel mace is several inches longer than that of a sledgehammer**, requiring more core activation when you use it.
- The steel mace handle has knurling, which helps you grip it. A sledgehammer isn't knurled, and can easily slip from sweaty hands.
- The macehead and handle of the steel mace are one piece of metal, so the head won't fly off. Sledgehammers can wear over time **until the metal head breaks off—potentially while you're swinging it!** This makes the sledgehammer a very dangerous tool to mimic steel mace training.

All of this is not to say that a sledgehammer can't make for a great piece of workout equipment. Most people like it best for slamming a tire, which trains the core in a rotational movement. But the steel mace is an overall more versatile and durable tool, and all but guarantees a safer workout. (It's also great for tire slams... just sayin'.)

WHAT MUSCLES DOES THE STEEL MACE WORK?

The short answer is all of them. Moves like the 360 will train your shoulders hard, rows will work your back, and twisting lunges will work your legs and core, but any and all mace exercises you try will put a high demand on your stabilizer muscles as you try to maintain good posture and alignment while the offset load of the mace tries to knock you off balance. We don't suggest you try to use the mace to replace bodybuilding training (i.e., don't set up a workout schedule with steel mace "leg days," "back days," etc.), but you can use it as a supplement to any workout you do that targets a particular muscle group.

HOW CAN I START DOING STEEL MACE FLOWS?

Master the basic mace exercises in Chapter 4, and then the workouts in Chapter 5. They will show you how to balance the mace and move fluidly between exercises. From there, you can try linking exercises together that flow into one another naturally, such as the ballistic curl to a 360, or a front squat to overhead press. We like the basic flow Leo Savage demonstrates [HERE](#).

THE 360 IS REALLY HARD FOR ME. HOW CAN I DO IT BETTER?

Many people have trouble getting the mace to swing freely overhead because their chests and shoulders are tight. Try the mace climber exercise to open them up—it's a good move to do as part of any warmup or cooldown.

Hold the mace with both hands overhead and elbows bent, so you allow the macehead to point toward the floor behind your back. Walk your hands up and down the handle. You'll feel your chest, shoulders, and triceps stretch as the macehead gently pulls them into greater ranges.

PICK UP AN ONNIT STEEL MACE [HERE](#)