

How Self-Defense and Fitness are One and the Same

Hello, my name is Steve Schwettman, and I'm an instructor at Altitude Martial Arts. I created this short E-Book to give you an idea of how traditional martial arts manages to tie self-defense and fitness together to create a fun environment to better our health.

Traditional martial arts might seem complex, but at its core it has a very simple goal: "To extend our life beyond the expected range." Indeed, regular martial arts training can extend our time on this Earth, allowing us to experience the richness of family and relationships beyond the average. But I think just as important, it improves the quality of each day we spend on this Earth.

I have been saddened at the sight of my elders wittling away their final years in a rocking chair or bed, unable to do the things that they loved when they were younger. I determined many years ago that I was going to make the best of each day I have. In fact, at this writing I'm 52 years old, and I still mountain bike, climb mountains, snowboard, listen to music too loud, play the guitar, fix up my own cars, the list goes on and on. I have no plans to stop any of these activities, ever. Because I enjoy them!

Now, when we think of self-defense, we usually imagine some bad actor comes into our life and threatens to do harm, at which point we take some action to either escape harm or subdue our attacker.

On the surface, fitness would seem to be a completely different animal. Keeping fit means things like watching our weight and building muscle.

But I'd like to ask you to try a quick thought experiment: For a moment, try to imagine that self-defense and fitness are the same thing...

I know that sounds strange on the surface, but consider a couple important points:

1. We are more likely to have our livelihood harmed by our poor health, than by an attacker.
2. If an attacker does enter our life, it will be much easier to deal with them if we are fit.

For these reasons, I consider fitness and self-defense to be very closely related. And this relationship is what shapes our martial arts training.

You see, I could take the easy road. I could create a whole bunch of ads and flyers that talk about the dangers that lurk around the corner, and create classes that prey upon the fears of others. But I don't want to train in a fear-mongering environment, and I don't want to impress that type of thought pattern onto others.

Instead, I've learned that it's possible to learn how to defend oneself from an attacker who is larger and stronger, while having fun, getting fit, and training our mental game, all at the same time. And the way that we accomplish this is through traditional martial arts.

So, I hope you now have a basic understanding of how self-defense is tied to fitness, and both are a core part of our training. We further break that down into hand-to-hand self-defense, as well as self-defense against weapons.

I like to break self-defense techniques into two levels. Level One self-defense is what we teach to beginners, and that involves learning how to break free from a dangerous situation so that you can escape, to run away.


Now in our Tang Soo Do - Taekwondo program, for instance, we extensively train kicks, punches, elbow strikes, all kinds of things that allow us to take control of a dangerous situation. And they're also fun for recreational sparring, and just getting in a good workout.

So, after our students have advanced sufficiently, we'll begin teaching what I call "Level Two self-defense", which allows a person to stand their ground and be a part of getting a dangerous situation under control.

As an example, let's say that an altercation breaks out at a restaurant. You get brought into that situation just by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Level One self-defense allows you to get yourself and your family away from the bad actors who may be trying to hold you to attack, to use you as a hostage or shield, or whatever.

Level One training provides you with a number of easy-to-remember methods to de-escalate the situation, or break free if you're under attack. Once you and your family are safely outside the restaurant, you can call the police.

Level Two training would allow you to help bring the bad actors under control so they can't harm anyone else. You would think that lots of people would run to your aid and help with this, but experience has shown that nearly everyone will just stand back and watch, or actually, get their phones out and start recording a video, rather than help. Much of this behavior is due to their insecurity and lack of training, simply having no idea what to do if a violent situation breaks out.



The following video talks about an important case study in self-defense. If you have some time to listen and think about what happened, I think it's a great exercise:

<https://youtu.be/q-BAta-bxsk?si=-Ab1yFET25yk7XdF>

In your first classes with us, we will provide a number of Level One techniques that can help you out of a bad situation. We'll describe the technique, and then we'll practice on each other in a safe way. I worked with one self-defense instructor a few months back who said that everyone needs to be on the receiving end of their techniques, so that they truly understand what works. For that reason, I'll ask that you select a partner to begin some simple drills that you will take turns practicing on each other.

Ground Rules: There is some terrible misinformation going around on social media that training isn't effective unless you are using full power and really trying to injure your partner. No legitimate school trains that way, not even world class MMA gyms. Because the stakes are too high. Instead, we learn the techniques in a safe way, and learn the delicate balance of power and control. Here are some of the ways we practice safely:

1. Tap means Let Go!
2. Use the lightest contact possible when you begin practicing with a partner. Over time, you and your partner can work out how much pressure is acceptable.
3. Apply pressure slowly rather than explosively, giving your partner time to tap if things become painful.
4. Over time and with practice, you will be able to build the intensity with your training partner in a safe way.

Some of the Level One techniques we will practice during your first months of training:

1. Wrist escapes.
2. Hair grabs.
3. Shoulder grabs.
4. Clothing grabs.
5. Body grabs.
6. Chokes.
7. Aggressive handshakes.
8. Basic groundwork.
9. How to safely stand up if you get knocked down.
10. Learn how not to act like a victim.
11. Learn to recognize and evade trouble.
12. Practice de-escalation.

As you advance to Level Two training, you will practice followups, safe chokeouts, surprise attacks, ground and pound, and multiple attackers. The intensity increases but the basics are the same.

After you've advanced to blue belt, you've demonstrated that you have the control and self-discipline to safely train more intense situations, so we will begin training how to defend against weapons. This also involves subjects such as the pros and cons of carrying a gun, a taser, a tactical flashlight, and some of the more discreet weapons that are out there such as a kobuton. And then we'll do some drills involving disarming an armed opponent.

But what I think is really cool about traditional martial arts is that while you're learning all of this, you are also conditioning your muscles, expanding your range of motion, improving flexibility and balance, developing strong mental discipline, and building relationships with other like-minded individuals and families. If you really like to challenge yourself, you can even compete in local and national tournaments, and cross-train with other schools in our association. We help facilitate all of this and can serve as your coach during large tournaments, such as with the AAU or Moo Duk Kwan.

Do I have to wear one of those ridiculous outdated uniforms that looks like pajamas???

This is another common misunderstanding about our training. There are very good reasons that we wear a traditional dobok. For one, they are extremely resistant to tearing when we practice self-defense scenarios. They allow for the freedom of movement that we need when stretching and kicking to our limits. They are also not overly revealing, which has its own advantages. That being said, we want everyone to be comfortable, so we do allow you to wear whatever you like, just understand that the quality of your training WILL be affected.

This and many other common questions are answered in our FAQ page at:

<https://www.altitudema.com/faq/>

I hope you'll join us to see if martial arts training improves your quality of life. It has improved mine, and I really want to share this with as many others as possible. See you in class!