

# Preventing and Training Through Injury

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## Prevention

### Overview

All physical activity comes with the risk of injury. If you are an athlete it is very likely that at some point in your training you will have to work around some type of physical discomfort and/or injury. Fortunately, the training you receive in a traditional dojo probably poses far fewer risks than found in many sports. The greatest way to prevent injuries is to be aware of their causes.

### Main Causes

Too much too soon: Shorin-Ryu techniques require physical conditioning, which takes time. Listen to your body, especially when first starting out. Take breaks, don't try to keep up with the advanced students, and give yourself time to build endurance. Even if you're fit, Shorin-Ryu will challenge your muscles, joints and tendons in new ways. Be on the lookout for old injuries resurfacing. Modifications include skipping every other count, lightening the weight load, and limiting your range of motion. If necessary, do these without being prompted by the instructor. Adjustments based on your body's feedback are *critical* for staying safe and moving forward.

Over training: As much as we would love to see you every day, it's important to give your body downtime to heal between vigorous workouts. Warning signs are loss of stamina or aching muscles and joints. The amount of downtime will fluctuate based on your individual healing patterns.

Ignoring the warning signs: Learn to distinguish the discomfort of exertion – such as increasing flexibility or strength – from the pain of injury. Injury pain usually has a sharp, sudden onset in a specific location and doesn't go away, even after a few days or weeks. Muscle pain is either a burning sensation caused by lactic acid, or a dull ache over the whole muscle that dissipates when the exercise ends. As you advance in rank (and age!), realize every technique you perform has a threshold; once you reach it, proceed with caution in order to *improve, not injure*, yourself. "No pain, no gain" does *not* mean every pain is a gain.

Inconsistent training: The body performs best when used to a routine. For example, taking 3 classes, 3 days in a row, after a 3 week hiatus is asking for trouble. Even if you are stiff or under the weather, it's important to keep moving. Modify the frequency and intensity of your training in appropriate increments based on what your body is telling you it needs. The goal is to develop a strategy that both challenges you *and* keeps you training well into old age. Hanshi is a phenomenal example of this!

Deviating from the traditional class exercises and structure: The reason we do warmups, basics, kata, stomach work, then kumite, in that order, is because it minimizes the risk of injury. If an instructor mistakenly deviates from the standard routine, or introduces an unconventional exercise, slow down: be extra vigilant to the possibility of harming yourself or fellow students. This also applies if you miss part of a class, or cool down too much during a break: warm yourself back up slowly if needed, before resuming full speed or power.

Misguided stoicism: Martial artists train to adapt and "keep going" if injured in a fight. This warrior spirit has its place in true life-and-death situations, but not in the dojo. Strive to develop stoicism, but not at the expense of common sense and your physical wellbeing. Speak up! Tell your instructor if an exercise is painful or too difficult. Simply say, "I'm working around an injury," and you can elaborate before or after class (if you want to). If you feel yourself getting injured, stop! Step out of the exercise or modify your movements to avoid exacerbating the injury. If you need to step off the deck let the instructor know.

### Recap

You have one body. You're in charge of it and you'll have it for your entire life, so listen to it and take care of it. Remember that karate is a lifetime marathon, not a sprint. And marathons have highs and lows, strong moments and weak moments. Navigate these with a "big picture" attitude that allows you to make it through the entire journey (which sometimes means slowing down a bit to make it through the next few miles).

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## Rehabilitation

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- Injuries such as breaks, tears, and illness happen despite best laid plans, and can disrupt your life. During these times it's important to listen to your doctor and your body very carefully. However, if karate was a positive aspect in your life pre-injury, and you continue to participate in some modified way through the recovery, the mental, physical and spiritual benefits of training invariably help with healing, and make a return to the physical activity of practicing karate easier.
- Everyone should know how to give themselves or others immediate basic first aid, such as applying ice, direct pressure, or a splint to a wound. In addition, Hanshi encourages every student to take a course in CPR.
- Do not hesitate to get prompt follow-up treatment from general and sports medicine professionals.

### Keep moving forward!

#### If you are unable to participate in a class:

- Visit the dojo and observe classes. You will get a lot from this "fly on the wall" perspective that you miss when you're in the middle of the action.
- Visualize yourself doing a perfect kata. Break down and picture each movement executed with optimal form, balance, speed and power from a variety of perspectives, both observer and performer. This is a proven way to make improvements in your technique regardless of your mobility or where you are in the healing process.
- Stay connected to your dojo community. Reach out to your training partners. They want to hear from you about your progress! They'll fill you in on what you're missing, and perhaps can offer practical advice based on experience.
- Go back to the resources. Watch the Kata DVD and go through the suggested reading materials with a fine-tooth comb (see the dojo library). Enjoy the opportunity to find details overlooked in previous readings.
- Come up with a project that will benefit your karate-do, the dojo, or the USRKUSA organization. For example, get a head start on your next test essay, make a piece of equipment or art for the dojo, or brainstorm with your Shihan promotional ideas.

### Take it slow!

#### Do NOT postpone your return to training until you think you're 100% recovered:

- Attend classes on a modified basis. Practice techniques half speed and power that do not involve the injury, such as blocks while seated in a chair, or stances with hands on hips or in a sling.
- Arrive early (if you can) to give yourself extra time to dress, stretch, and warm up.
- Be gentle: Work slow motion, use higher stances, or limit your range of motion as needed.
- Remind yourself and others of your injury by wearing a sling or brace, but try not let these become permanent. Although the extra stability while healing is essential, long-term use, unless required, has the potential to weaken the joint in the long run.
- Communicate clearly with the instructor and any training partners what your limitations are.
- Be patient: Work your way slowly toward (or back to) the ideal techniques and positions. This will require much discipline, self-awareness, and probably some new (and possibly inventive) workarounds.
- Beware: Muscle memory is a powerful thing, and your body might automatically try to move the way it used to before the injury. Conversely, don't let your workarounds become lasting habits. Keep working toward by-the-book techniques as your recovery allows.

### Recap

Being injured and unable to do your regular activities can be demoralizing and frustrating. This is completely normal. However, try not to let it take over. Strive to stay positive. Show adaptability. Learn to see the opportunities created by any misfortune. It takes both courage and humility to show up and modify your techniques. Overcoming adversity not only fortifies us, but shows our true colors far more than how we enjoy success.