

Karate Training and Conditioning

By Robert Miller, CPT, CES, F4FA

Conditioning is Not Optional

Whatever else karate may involve; it is about learning to fight. Students come to karate believing it will help them learn to fight. Fighting requires a high degree of fitness. Although karate may not be best understood as a sport or fitness regime that does not mean that students should be lead to believe that fitness is not fundamental to fighting or safe training (to fight).

Supplemental training should be safe. Supplemental training should stress the body in ways analogous in relevant ways to the kinds of stress that fighting will place on the body; the difference is that supplemental training should be safer. In supplemental training there should be fewer unaccounted for forces acting on the body at once than there are in real fighting or in training. Supplemental training should reduce injury rates; if the reverse is happening reevaluate your program.



A realistic conditioning program should include training in at least the following areas :

- **Weight bearing strength training** necessary to prevent injuries from darting, changing directions, being thrown, and from having joints manipulated. Strength training should also be sufficient to allow safe lifting actions within the context of throwing.
- **Agility training** to facilitate safe and rapid changes of direction, height, and position (i.e. prone, kneeling, standing etc.)
- **Balance training** designed to develop balance in the context of movement under (potentially eccentric) load.
- **Explosiveness training** requiring “fast twitch” muscle fibers to work close to capacity. Sprints, medicine ball work and other plyometric based training can be very useful for this.
- **Cardio-Vascular endurance** to both enhance the students ability to “stay in the fight” until an opportunity to react decisively presents itself, and to prevent the likelihood of sudden strokes or heart attacks while training intensely or fighting. Train to shorten recovery periods between high intensity “bursts” of activity.
- **Muscular endurance training.** In a fight it is not likely that you will only need one principle exertion to finish things. Even negotiating for position takes an incredible amount of energy when you are in a fight. Train accordingly.
- **Functional flexibility** (as opposed to absolute flexibility which when made the focus of flexibility programs may undercut joint stability and strength). Static stretches should only be performed at the end of training rather than during warm ups.

Training Considerations



Trying to fully incorporate every element is not likely to be practical for most classes. It is not a good idea however to leave the responsibility for conditioning solely to the students. Most students have limited time to devote to karate so if time for conditioning is not carved out of classes, many will not devote adequate time to it. Think about emphasizing some aspects over others rotating the emphasis areas in order to program conditioning over time.

If, for example, you are planning a phase of training focusing on free sparring or other skills that require rapid shifting it may be a good idea to dedicate more time to agility and balance training in the weeks beforehand. During practices actually incorporating free sparring it may be a good idea to add more lower body strength training to the pre-practice warm ups in order to protect the knees.

Of course such precise programming will only work if students attend classes regularly. Students need to take some responsibility for their progress. Teachers are well within their rights to address the potential consequences of poor or irregular attendance with the students. Explaining to students the aim of the training they are receiving and giving them some idea of what is to come helps motivate greater involvement.

About the author:

Robert Miller has been training and teaching karate for more than 30 years and is currently ranked as a 6th dan with the Seijinkai Karate Association. His explorations into effective training and technique have led him to pursue training in Aikido and Judo, studies in anatomy, kinesiology, and education, as well as cross-training with a diverse range of classical and modern martial artists. Miller holds Certified Personal Trainer, Corrective Exercise Specialist certifications through the NASM and a Fitness for fighting Arts Trainer certification. Miller teaches a very rugged and practical approach to fighting skills and self defense to adults groups in St. Louis, Missouri. He can be reached at:

inquiries@tkri.net

