

# TAEKWON-DO AND PHYSICAL FITNESS

The study of Taekwon-Do offers several unique advantages to the physical fitness of the student.

No doubt one of life's most treasured assets is good health. Therefore, one of the great "cardinal sins of mankind is his abuse of this asset. Incidentally, he who does not abuse or hurt his own body, including the hair, is defined as obedient to his parents; so described in Oriental philosophy.

Wealth, power, fame and the blessing of physical beauty are all relatively unimportant if one does not possess good health. An individual owes it to himself and his family to constantly maintain and improve his health. Confucius said: "Being in good health is a way of showing great devotion to the parents, as child's health is their utmost concern."

The students will realise how important Taekwon-Do is to human health through the following article written by Dr. Robert S. Arner, a black belt holder of Taekwon-Do.

Taekwon-Do may be practiced individually or in groups without the use of weights or special equipment. It is, in most cases, practiced alone except the sparring. Since the body sets its own limits, injuries or strains are rare and the physical condition of the student paces him automatically. The entire muscle system of the body, from the fingers to the toes, is brought into play.

The training does not produce large knotty muscles, it tends to exchange flabby fat tissue for lean tissue. The thick muscles developed through weight training tend to push the blood vessels apart without adding new ones to fill the gap. Such tissue has difficulty in receiving oxygen and disposing of waste through the blood stream and thus tires more easily.

Taekwon-Do's high repetition, low resistance movements develop a longer, leaner and more flexible musculature. Such muscles have more of their areas close to blood supply routes, thus producing maximum endurance and well being. (Brown, p. 231)

The emphasis in twisting the trunk in executing the kicking movements and in counter balancing the hand movements builds a firm, well-muscled abdomen. The high leg raise proceeding most of the kicks in Taekwon-Do also develops the side of the trunk and inner thigh muscles. The study of Taekwon-Do is particularly recommended for women because of this development of the lower abdomen, hips, and inner thighs; areas which produce a youthful feminine figure for women of all ages.

After childbirth in particular, these areas are stretched and weakened; Taekwon-Do training is ideal to restore muscle tone for health as well as appearance.

The typical training regime, involving extensive movements of the entire body, raises the pulse rate and oxygen characteristics of the heart and lungs over an extended period. This increased ventilation is termed an aerobic effect (Cooper, p. 108) and provides the following benefits:

1. Helps the lungs operate more efficiently.
2. Enlarges the blood vessels, making them more pliable and reducing the resistance to blood flow, thus lowering the diastolic blood pressure.
3. Increases the blood supply, especially red blood cells and hemoglobin.
4. It makes the body tissue healthier in supplying it with more oxygen.
5. It conditions the heart, providing more reserve for emergencies.

6. It promotes better sleep and waste elimination.

The training tends to be a normalizer of body weight in that it results in a gain of solid tissue for the under-weight and a loss of body fat for the obese. The estimated calorie consumption for a vigorous Taekwon-Do workout is about six hundred calories per hour one of the highest for any sports activity.

Since the expenditure of about 3,500 calories results in a weight loss of one pound, it will be seen that a weekly training schedule of only six hours will result in weight loss of one pound per week.

Taekwon-Do offers a super means of developing the characteristics of good performance in other sports, as suggested by Moloy (p. 311):

1. Muscular strength.
2. Dynamic energy—the ability to throw oneself into performance with vigor.
3. Ability to change the direction of movement.
4. Agility—the ability to move the body quickly from one place in space to another.
5. Flexibility of joints, muscles and ligaments.
6. Peripheral vision.
7. Concentration and the ability to avoid distraction.
8. Understanding the mechanics and techniques of body movements.

"Focus" requires that we have muscular strength, balance and the exertion of dynamic energy when we concentrate all the power of the body at one point in space. Combinations of fundamental movements and patterns develop agility and the ability to change movements as well as direction while sparring develops peripheral vision and concentration.

The organized training procedures stress a systematic warm up of muscles and ligaments, increasing blood volume and flow through the muscles. These warming up exercises promote flexibility of joints, tendons and ligaments as well as serving to prevent injuries in training.

The regime also stresses warming down exercises after training to pump down the accumulation of blood and fluid present in the muscles after violent exercises. If this is not done, stiffness and discomfort will result. (Williams, p. 55)

These techniques of warming up and warming down as well as the breathing exercise taught are other examples of the highly developed science of body mechanics and physiology contained within formal Taekwon-Do training.

The attacking "Yell" that is taught also has its basis in basic physiology. Aside from serving to demoralize the opponent, the "Yell" serves also to tighten the lower abdominal muscles to prevent injury in the event of an unexpected counter-attack. In addition, the exhalation, or thoracic grunt as practiced also by weightlifters or wrestlers serves to equalize the pressure increase in the thorax which may result from violent exertion, thus preventing injury to the vital organs. The complete exhalation of the "Yell" serves to expel the tidal air of the lungs thus increasing the breathing or vital capacity of the lungs.

It can be seen that the study of Taekwon-Do is recommended for men, women and children. It may provide benefits in perceptual-motor organization, concentration, vision, body development, aerobic conditioning of the heart and lungs and provides training in body control which is valuable in the pursuit of any other sport or physical activity. Coupled with the obvious benefits in self-defense and the satisfaction of mastering ancient art form, it would appear that Taekwon-Do should be part of the life of all people for all their life.