

## **Tae Kwon Do – Injury Contemplation/Seminar 4/25/10**

### **By Darin Smith**

#### **Part I. Preventing/Avoiding Injury**

- Warm up before stretching. Stretching prior to warming up can potentially cause injury.
- Land softly and cautiously when doing jump kicks on hard surfaces. Land on the ball of foot to use it as a shock absorber instead of landing hard on the heel or sole of the foot, which might cause a hard impact on the joints.
- Listen to pain. There is a difference from small bumps/bruises and discomfort vs. real pain (indicating tissue damage) which is a signal that you should stop.
- Focus on good technique – bend toes back on front kick, fingers together tight with knife hand blocks, turn bottom foot with kicks, land soft on jump kicks. Etc. Situps – keep butt on ground, leg-lifts – keep a slight bend in the knees.
- Wear pads and protective gear when sparring.
- Practice control – Do not throw a kick or punch if you don't know where it is going.
- Listen to your body and know your limits. Take care of yourself. Get necessary rest and recuperation time. Avoid overtraining which can cause fatigue, decreased immune system functioning, and decreased performance.
- Try to strengthen areas that may be weak and creating an imbalance. We do hundreds of sit ups and crunches, but very few low back exercises which can create a postural imbalance and result in back injury and pain. Shoulder issues may requires some strengthening exercises deep down at the rotator cuff (shoulder rotations).
- Stay focused. Injuries often occur when we are not paying attention to our surroundings. Distractions or playing around during sparring can easily lead to an injury. Pay attention to the floor surface, the people near you, and the immediate area around you.
- Do not practice techniques you have not been formally taught.
- Communicate with partners. Whether stretching, sparring, or hitting targets, can help avoid confusion and possible injury.

#### **Part II. Physically Dealing with Injury**

- Do not keep stretching an injured area. A torn/stretched muscle, tendon, or ligament will only be made worse.
- RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation) immediately to reduce swelling. (Ice especially during the first 24-48 hours of an injury. Invest in a reusable ice pack and heat pad). Need to get swelling down early to help injury heal faster. You can use heat or cold after the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, but only cold at first.
- Stay off of it. It is tempting to use the body part at half power/half speed early on during your recovery, but you might just be prolonging your recovery time.
- Find alternatives to training the injured area to keep in shape. Injured hand – work on lower body conditioning, kicks, footwork, bagwork, etc. Try no hands sparring matches. Injured foot – work on ab conditioning, push ups, punches, blocks, wrist locks, bagwork, groundfighting, weapon training, swimming, forms

- in a pool. Back – wrist/forearm conditioning, biceps/triceps, light stretching, kicks in hot tub, half speed forms w/o kicks, dynamic tension exercises. Try improving strength through weight training or work on improving flexibility of non-injured areas. Think about ways to work on balance, power, or speed. If you have a hurt arm or leg, work on improving the ability of the good arm or leg.
- Even after you've healed take your time returning back to your normal routine. Make a schedule; basic kicks, no contact sparring, jump kicks later, etc.)

### **Part III. Mentally Dealing with Injury**

- Be patient and don't get frustrated. You need to remember that TKD is a lifelong pursuit. There is no hurry. Get in the mindset to get healthy first, and then return to training: TKD will still be there for you.
- Try to keep a positive attitude toward the healing process. Look at it as a challenge or a learning experience instead of an obstacle. For example, when my foot was broken I concentrated on using my crutches as much as possible to challenge myself and also get an arm workout.
- Don't listen to horror stories from people who might discourage you. When you tell someone you got an injury, many people will tell you to stop working out or doing tae kwon do. Stay focused and optimistic and believe in the power of your mind for healing. Visualize getting better.
- Continue to work on the mental part of techniques. Even if you can't execute the physical techniques, work through the forms and 3/1 steps to keep the movements fresh in your mind.
- Realize when you return that even if the wounds have healed, psychologically you may still have to learn to trust that another injury won't occur. You may be timid or overly cautious which may throw off your concentration and create a self-fulfilling prophecy in which you end up causing an injury. Take your time to regain your confidence and learn to trust yourself again.

### **Part IV. Maintaining Spirit with Injury**

- Getting an injury can completely drain a martial artist's spirit, especially in the case of a reoccurring injury or one that may substantially limit their abilities in the future. Even though we train with the mindset of never giving up, it is easy to get bitter or frustrated and consider whether or not it is worth continuing an activity that results in repetitive or serious injuries. Feelings of frustration, anger, weakness, isolation, sadness, despair, and even embarrassment are all possible emotions that we may have to cope with during the course of the healing process. Take the time to acknowledge the emotional depth of your injury and attempt to understand its impact on you. Your recovery is not just one of physical healing, but also one of psychological and emotional healing as well.
- When my back got really bad the first time, I finally had to take 3 months off. It was hard not to be able to kick, punch, block, spar, or even do basic movements. Little by little though, I found ways to keep my spirit high.
  - I used the injury as an opportunity to let my students lead class, which allowed them to gain experience.

- I tried to refine my teaching techniques and learned how to better describe the techniques since I couldn't physically demonstrate them.
- I was able to take a better look at my students and apply a critical eye to their techniques.
- I also tried to inject more spirit into the class by researching and adding new training drills and techniques to the class. I focused on challenging my students to try hard even though I couldn't.
- I found difficult exercises that I could while everyone else was doing the warm-ups so that I could stay active and work on some type of physical conditioning.
- I sought out martial arts books on training and philosophy and wrote down ideas in a journal.
- I wrote down goals and lists of exercises in my journal to stay inspired during the injury.

## **Part V. Learning from Injury**

- Learn humility. You are not indestructible or invincible. When you are young, anything seems possible. As you age, you come to the realization that there are some limitations and declines in your physical abilities and functioning. This doesn't mean that you quit training or trying advanced techniques, it means that you learn to be smarter about your training and making decisions that will keep you practicing over a lifetime.
  - For example, instead of pushing past an obvious injury out of ego or machismo, recognizing that you need to take care of that injury so you will quickly heal and be able to practice again.
- Don't view it as downtime, view it as a chance to experiment and grow as a martial artist. When I get an injury these days, I start making a battle plan for healing, training around the injury, and then rehabilitating it. I start browsing through my martial arts library for books to read or re-read and I get psyched up for all the new things I plan to do once I recover. Use this time to teach yourself a new weapon, learn some wrist locks, grappling or groundfighting techniques, or learn some techniques from another martial arts style. During my back injury I took the opportunity during my recover to take tai chi classes for almost a year which was therapeutic, kept me involved in martial arts activity, and taught me greater dimensions of martial arts than I previously had experienced. Maybe read up on self-defense and prepare a self-defense course that you plan to teach when you fully recover.
- Use this experience to teach others. My back, knee, shoulder and foot injuries all gave me the chance to learn about how to treat and rehab these problems. Now I can recognize these injuries in my students and give them advice on how to cope with it, both mentally and physically. Just like any other difficulty, injuries provide an opportunity to learn and can be a valuable experience.
- Learn about yourself. Injuries provide a chance for self-exploration. You may learn a lot about your motivation, spirit, patience, perseverance, attitude, discipline, and reasons you continue to practice TKD. If you recover from the

injury and you are still motivated to keep training, I guarantee you will gain something positive from the experience.

- Learn how to work around an injury for self-defense purposes. In a fight, you may be injured and may not be able to function at full capacity, but you may still need to defend yourself. If you have a hurt arm, work on sparring with that arm behind your back. If you have a hurt leg, practice blocks and strikes that you can do while supporting yourself on your good leg. Think about how you can use your shoulder or leg to block if your arm is damaged.