

Frequently Asked Questions

If you have other questions or comments, don't hesitate to contact us:

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Why should I practice karate?

The benefits of karate practice are myriad. Physically it enhances strength, coordination, stamina, balance and flexibility. It is well documented that regular exercise can improve both the quality and longevity of your life and that it makes people feel happier and more alert. There is also evidence that exercise can help cognitive brain function. Everything that you do in your life becomes a bit easier because of your karate practice.

Karate trains the mind as well as the body, resulting in improved self-awareness, discipline, confidence and will power. Not only will you become more confident that you can defend yourself, but your confidence to tackle all of life's trials will grow.

One of the translations of the Japanese symbol for martial arts (the "bu" in "budo") is "to stop conflict". This is a philosophical goal for a martial artist, but does not only apply to external conflicts. Karate training results in feeling less conflict within yourself as a result of what's usually referred to as increased "inner harmony" and "inner strength".

Do you have to be a UConn student to join?

No, the UConn Karate Club is a student-run organization and, although most of its members are college students, its membership is open to all.

When do you accept new students?

Formal beginner classes start at the onset of each University semester (around Jan 25th and August 25th) and at the beginning of either of two summer sessions (around May 20th and July 7th). You can start anytime you wish; however, it's a little easier (physically and psychologically) for most people to start at the same time as other beginners.

What do I have to do to join?

All you have to do is come to any of our classes and try it out! If you decide you like it, you can then see a club officer and fill out an application and release form. If you're shopping around for martial arts schools, you're welcome to come observe class and talk to the instructors or club members.

What should I wear? - Do I need to buy a uniform?

Beginners are not required to wear uniforms (called "karate-gi") during the first 3 months of practice. Any kind of light clothing that you can stretch and move easily in is OK. Beginning students do have the option of purchasing uniforms if they wish.

Do I need previous martial arts experience?

No, most of our new members have no previous experience. If you have experience in karate or some other martial art, of course you're also welcome.

How often should I practice?

Beginners (and advanced students for that matter) should establish a regular and consistent training schedule in order to learn techniques efficiently and not develop too many bad habits. In general, the more you train the faster you'll learn. Three times a week is a reasonable target for beginners to aspire to. Two times a week is OK, but learning is slower. Progress is very slow and bad habits become rampant at practice levels below two times per week.

It is important that beginners not expect instant results! Karate takes patience and perseverance - it takes years to become proficient no matter how often you train. You must also balance training with your life. Don't neglect other things due to excessive training.

How old should a child be before starting karate?

This depends on the child's maturity and attention span, which can vary widely among individuals. For most children, age 8 should be considered as a minimum and around age 10 as an optimum starting age.

The value of teaching martial arts to very young children is arguable. Kids who start young usually end up quitting young. They view karate as just another one of a parade of activities that mom and dad have ushered them through (like ballet and midget ice hockey). It could be argued that karate geared for children is more beneficial than many other available activities; however, starting a child young is probably not the best way to introduce him to karate as a lasting endeavor. Moreover, most young children do not have the maturity to use their physical techniques only for self-defense. If your child expresses interest in karate, she should be told that karate practice is very serious and that only "big kids" who can be responsible are allowed to do it.

Can older adults practice karate?

Karate can be practiced at any age as long as a person is relatively healthy. A physical exam and doctor's OK is a good idea for anyone older than age 50 or so. Older people may not be as strong, fast or flexible as someone in their 20's, but they can still practice karate at their own pace and derive great physical and emotional benefit from it.

How coordinated and physically fit do I have to be to practice karate?

Most world karate champions, like any top athlete, were probably well-coordinated natural athletes before they began their karate training. Most of us, however, come to karate in order to become more coordinated and physically fit. So the brief answer is, "not very". Even if you feel like the world's greatest "spaz", you can still practice karate and by doing so, your coordination and fitness will greatly improve.

Will I get hurt practicing karate?

Karate training is very rigorous. Bumps, bruises and sore muscles are not uncommon. Serious injuries are extremely uncommon; however, because karate emphasizes physical and mental control as well as respect for your training partner. No contact is allowed during our sparring exercises or during competitions. The

result is that karate practice is considerably safer than many other popular sports such as basketball and soccer.

How long must I train before I can defend myself?

The ability to defend oneself from attack is dependent on many factors. Certainly, the longer you train, the more able you will become. The probability of success is relative to the strength and ability of the defender vs. that of the attacker(s). It is important to realize; however, that there are no guarantees! It is possible for a beginner to get lucky or an advanced karate person to be caught during an inattentive moment. This uncertainty is one of the practical reasons why strategies that reduce the chance of conflict are more important to self-defense than physical prowess.

Beyond all that, a beginner should think on the order of years (as opposed to weeks or months) before he/she begins to be proficient at karate. Herein lies the danger of the many so called "self defense courses" that typically run from 6 to 8 weeks. Nothing of great lasting value comes easily or quickly. The most important thing a short course can teach you about self-defense is how vulnerable you really are if attacked and that you should be extremely cautious about dangerous environments. The value of any physical techniques taught in such a course is questionable.

How effective is karate REALLY?

Again this depends on the ability of the individual karate student. The most adept technicians in the world, who train constantly and have devoted their lives to mastering the art, are certainly able to vanquish multiple, variously armed attackers under most circumstances. The key to this is highly developed timing, reflexes, and accuracy as well as developing sufficient power to disable an attacker with a single blow. The average karate student with only a few years of experience may not be able to do all the things you see on TV, but his karate knowledge could nonetheless save his life.

When do we get to free spar?

Basic sparring is emphasized during the first year or so of practice. Free sparring becomes more important for advanced students. The main reason for this is that good basic technique is a prerequisite to effective free sparring and too much free sparring tends to create bad habits in basic technique. Beginners occasionally free spar, but typically it is with senior students as partners. This is

primarily for safety reasons - the senior students won't hurt you because they have learned to control their techniques, and no matter how unpredictable your technique is, you probably won't be able to hurt them.

Can I compete in tournaments?

If you want to. We participate in a number of regular competitions as a supplemental form of training and a means to test skills. Competition is stressed as an important, but optional, training opportunity. Tournament prowess is not a goal in traditional karate. More important is development of body, mind and a non-violent philosophy.

What do I call the teacher?

Instructors are addressed as "Sensei". Sensei is a Japanese title of respect (sort of like "Sir" or "Mister"). It means "teacher" and is literally translated as "before birth" which infers that the instructor is someone older than yourself. In this case we are speaking of "karate age". In other words, an instructor is someone who has more karate experience than yourself. Sensei and "Master" are titles which people use to refer to or address someone else. It is considered very improper to refer to oneself as Sensei or Master.

"Sempai" ("senior") is another term of respect that is often used when addressing someone who is not an instructor, but is senior to you in karate experience.

What's all this bowing about?

Bowing is a gesture of kindness and respect for another person. Common among Eastern cultures, we have no real equivalent here in the West. Bowing is a both a greeting and an acknowledgement of another person's worth. Karate students embrace a philosophy that all people are worthy of respect. Learning to respect others is paramount to correct understanding of martial arts. Great physical and mental power must be offset by making a habit of putting other people before oneself, otherwise karate students might easily become bullies. So as we gain strength with potential to harm others, we also endeavor to become kinder people. Bowing and other forms of martial arts etiquette are training tools to help the karate student make kindness a habit.

What are the belts (ranks) in karate and how long does it take to reach them?

Beginning students first go through the "kyu" ranks. Students typically rise in rank by one kyu every 3 to 6 months. Kyu ranks and the color belts that go with them are:

White belt - 8th kyu, 7th kyu

Green belt - 6th kyu, 5th kyu, 4th kyu

Brown belt - 3rd kyu, 2nd kyu, 1st kyu

Six months after students attain 1st kyu, they may then start testing for "dan" (black belt) ranks. Students who train regularly typically require 3 to 5 years to reach the first level (Shodan) of black belt. Each succeeding black belt level requires increasingly more time to attain. For example, it generally takes at least 2 years to go from Shodan (1st degree) to Nidan (2nd degree), at least 3 years between Nidan and Sandan (3rd degree), and at least 5 years between Sandan and Yondan (4th degree).

What's a karate class like?

Karate training is a combination of aerobic, endurance, flexibility and strengthening exercises, all the while honing the practical skills of the art. The training is very rigorous - expect to sweat a lot. Classes are typically 1.5 hrs in duration. Beginners have separate classes for 2 to 4 weeks where they gradually build up technique and fitness levels before joining in with the regular class. The JKA Boston web page has a good description of a ["typical" karate class](#).

How does Shotokan karate differ from other martial arts?

All martial arts have their specialties and unique character. Shotokan is traditional Japanese karate that specializes in punching, striking, kicking and blocking techniques. However, there is much overlap in technique among martial arts styles. For example, we also do sweeping, throwing and joint-locking techniques. In Shotokan, you won't see much of the flashy spinning and jumping about that is popular in martial arts movies - just techniques that are powerful and effective.

What's different about traditional martial arts?

Traditional martial arts emphasize a holistic view to training both the body and the mind. Philosophy and ideals are just as important to traditional martial arts

as physical prowess (see [the Dojo Kun](#)). Traditional martial arts are based on time-honored techniques and systems. Classes are more disciplined and place more emphasis on etiquette than the typical street-corner karate school.

What's the advantage of a JKA karate school?

The Japan Karate Association is the largest and one of the most prestigious martial arts schools in the world. Exacting standards of technique and rank are the same in our club as they are in Japan. JKA schools will not compromise their ranking standards just to keep students happy. Instructors are nationally and internationally certified and regularly participate in instructor training courses and seminars to better their teaching skills throughout their lives. Regular training camps provide JKA students exposure to a great number of world-class karate instructors. Your JKA rank is recognized throughout the world. Independent schools and smaller organizations do not have this depth of opportunity to offer.

What are the dojo rules?

There is a lot of etiquette (for example, bowing) associated with traditional karate, but few rules. The line between the two is often thin. Karate etiquette is based on respect and kindness toward other people, while dojo rules are more for safety and not disrupting the class.

Some of the steadfast rules are:

- No shoes may be worn on the practice floor (we practice in bare feet).
- Fingernails and toenails must be trimmed to a reasonable length (otherwise they become dangerous weapons to your partners).
- No jewelry (including rings, watches and necklaces) may be worn during practice. This is also primarily for safety reasons. Exceptions may be made for simple items that could not hurt a person or be accidentally pulled off.
- No talking during class. Raise your hand if you have a question/comment. Some quiet instruction/advice between students is OK if brief.
- Students may not enter or leave class without an instructor's permission. If you are late, you must wait at the side until you are acknowledged to enter class. If you wish to leave for any reason, you must raise your hand first.

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