

Preventing Martial Arts Injuries

According to the book *Epidemiology of Sports Injuries*, there are a number of factors to consider when addressing injury prevention techniques in martial arts.

- **Athlete's age:** The older the participant, the higher the prevalence of injury.
- **Body weight:** An increase in body weight may predispose young male Taekwondo competitors to injury.
- **Technique:** A lack of refined technique may contribute to injury. For example, poor fist technique may be related to hand fractures in karate, and competing with open hands in Taekwondo will likely invite fractures or other finger injuries.

All martial arts instructors must be knowledgeable of the arts they teach as well as injury prevention techniques. Many continuing education programs can expand instructors' knowledge of injury prevention. Two such programs are P.R.E.P.A.R.E. by the National Center for Sports Safety, and Risk Management in Sports offered by George Washington University. Another excellent resource is *The Bare Essentials Guide to Martial Arts Injury Care & Prevention*, by Trish Bare Grounds, available at Turtlepress.com. Also, all instructors should know CPR and first aid.

Knowing what parents expect out of your program and their child can be important components to controlling injuries. Keep parents informed of their child's development and skill level, and remind them of the inherent risks of the art they are practicing. Encourage students to voice concerns about the difficulty of skills practiced and pain experienced.

Establish an environment that promotes safety and enforces the use of safety equipment at all times. Make everyone involved in your program responsible for safety, and hold them accountable for incidents that could have been avoided had established rules been followed.

An injury prevention program should involve parents, instructors, students, and their physician. To protect the student's health and your business from liability, require each new student to complete a pre-participation physical exam, and require another exam before a student returns to practice following an injury.

Document your overall injury prevention program and maintain it as part of your business records. Maintain each staff member's continuing education records in their personnel file. Review your plan quarterly so everyone is aware of your expectations to keep injuries out of your facility.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.