BENEFITS OF TAEKWONDO IN EVERY DAY LIFE

Taekwondo training can benefit different people in so many different ways, you only have to look at the various posters and adverts spelling out the advantages of training in Taekwondo. These can include:-

Self Defence (with all the various adjectives)

Improved Confidence

Improved Fitness, strength and stamina

Improved flexibility

Improved concentration and self esteem

Greater self discipline

Develop a slimmer and more toned physique

Improved agility and reflexes

The ability to set and achieve personal goals

Develop new friendships

I’m sure you have all seen the various school adverts and posters using terms like the ones described above.

It’s a proven fact that all the above examples can be achieved through continual Taekwondo training but the one question that has always puzzled me is “how does it work?”

Some things like increased physical differences, strength, stamina, agility, better toned body etc. can without doubt be attributed to the physical side of Taekwondo, the physical training or to put it in TKD terms, the “Tae” and the “Kwon”.

But what about the Confidence, self discipline, Character development, improved self esteem etc?. They come about through the “Do” part of the training. This improvement is so subtle that at first the student doesn’t even notice the improvement, but it happens all the same.

This is in contrast to the physical improvements which can be quite noticeable in a short space of time.
A student that has done no exercise for years should see a noticeable improvement in their cardiovascular fitness after several weeks training. I’m sure you have had new students who struggle to jog once round the gym yet after a couple of months they are starting to keep up with the other students. This kind of improvement is easy to explain.

The Tae and Kwon as previously stated refer to the physical part of the Taekwondo training and therefore it is through this that your physical health, fitness and strength are improved.

Taekwondo training can and should also be supplemented by other important factors to ensure the body, mind and spirit are developed as one. For this to happen there are various types of health and fitness regimes that you can also use to gain maximum benefit.

For example one of the many reasons for people taking up Taekwondo is the desire to lose weight as well as improve their health and fitness. The obvious answer is to do some cardio work but it is also possible to actually lose weight with a sensible weight training programme to complement your Taekwondo training, however lets look at these two methods of training and their benefits:

**CARDIO FITNESS**

A good cardio routine is important, not just to keep your heart, lungs and circulation in a good and healthy condition but also to for its fat burning potential.

It is also extremely important for its performance and immunity boosting effects and if performed correctly it is not counter productive to a weight training programme.

You can train your aerobic system to be a much more efficient fat burning machine in much the same way that you can build your muscles to become bigger and stronger. The overall benefits of a cardio training routine are:
Increased Cardio Vascular fitness and endurance

Reduces body fat and maintains low body fat percentage.

Increases the body’s fat burning capacity during exercise and rest.

Improves body composition.

Increases metabolic rate.

Reduces stress and anxiety.

Increases confidence, self esteem and mood.

Reduces blood pressure, blood cholesterol and the risk of heart disease.

Boosts the immune system.

**The Scientific bit:** A regular routine can increase the body’s ability to break down fat by increasing the production of hormone dependent lipase, an enzyme that breaks down fat into it’s component fatty acids, which are then transported to the muscle via the bloodstream: These are then broken down to release energy.

**Muscle Fitness**

Muscle fitness is as important as keeping your cardiovascular system healthy. Human movement depends on transforming the chemical energy bound in ATP (adenosine triphosphate) into mechanical motion. The energy transformation is achieved through the skeletal muscle system. Muscular forces acting on the body’s bony lever system cause one or more bones to move about their joint axis.

So in order to develop strong and flexible movement of joints as well as decrease the risk of creating imbalances in the skeletal system (in turn creating future problems such as low back pain etc.), muscle health is essential.

Also a healthy muscular and toned body can improve weight loss as larger and stronger muscles require more energy to function and this results in an increase in the body’s metabolic rate and so increases the fat burning potential. The benefits of stronger, exercised muscles are:
Better Posture.

Improved flexibility.

More strength.

More energy.

Increased metabolic rate (better fat loss potential).

Defined body shape.

Any health or fitness program should always contain some form of muscle work out, this is most important.

It’s true that you can get a lot of what’s required from Taekwondo lessons, however as it’s not practical to arrange every lesson on just cardio and muscle development as there are other things that need attention, working on technique, set sparring, learning new patterns, taking time to work on defining moves, kicks, stances etc to get them technically correct.

This is where your extra complimentary training comes into it’s own. By Complimentary i mean “as well as” not “instead of.”

Various extra activities to compliment your Taekwondo class can be:

Squad training.( fitness, strength and sparring)

Circuit training.(Cardio, overall fitness and flexibility)

A weights program.(strength)

Swimming.(endurance)

Running. Fitness and endurance)

Cycling (fitness and endurance)

Various aerobic routines, pilates, zumba, step aerobics etc (fitness , flexibility and endurance)

A second “sport” such as

Squash (for explosive power and agility)

Yoga (for balance and flexibility)

Ballet (for balance, flexibility and leg strength)

Gymnastics (strength, flexibility, balance and endurance)
These are just a few examples of extra training and how they can compliment your Taekwondo training.

Another benefit from training at a Taekwondo school is that you can improve at your own pace, remember every one is different and some need more time to improve but with perseverance and the encouragement of a good Instructor almost every student is capable of achieving a Black belt, it may take 3 years it may take 5 or longer depending the amount of training, commitment, perseverance and the students ability to learn and adapt to Taekwondo, but the old saying:-

“A Winner NEVER quits and a quitter NEVER wins” is so true. I have heard it said that a “Black belt is just a White belt that NEVER gave up”. This also is very true.

A famous Korean Master once said “The road is long and there are many obstacles but for those who persevere the rewards are more than you can ever imagine. This i promise you”

Grand Master Hee-Il-Cho 9th Dan.

Remember the fitter, stronger and more toned you are the better you will feel about yourself in your everyday life. This will not only benefit yourself but also your family and children by being able to participate more with them in their activities.

There is also the social side of Taekwondo where you meet new friends with similar interests and socialise (or not) together.

At Master Clive Harrison’s Family Taekwondo families are encouraged to train together and support each other throughout their training. This builds a strong and lasting bond between parents and their children and also Brother and Sister.

**Self Defence**

It may sound a bit like teaching your granny to suck eggs to say that the self defence side of Taekwondo is vitally important, you would probably say this is obvious, yes it is, but not always for the most obvious reason.

It may seem silly to state that the self defence side of Taekwondo may be the most important part of the physical side to the training but not necessarily for the need to physically defend yourself. Confused ??? you probably are but bear with me and i’ll try to explain.

When asked his style the late Bruce Lee said in Enter the Dragon, “my style is the Art of Fighting without Fighting”, and demonstrated this without the need to physically defend himself to beat his opponent.
I believe (or hope) that of the 5 million + Taekwondo students around the World only a small percentage would ever have to resort to use Taekwondo in a physical way. The chances of a physical attack on yourself, family or friend is still a relatively rare occurrence. So the chances of you having to use the techniques of Taekwondo for real to diffuse or nullify a physical confrontation or assault are minimal.

Why?? Because the Taekwondo training you have amassed over a number of years have given you the confidence to diffuse a situation without the need for physical violence. The confident manner in which you present yourself and are able to verbally stand up for yourself and take charge or reason with an aggressor in a confident way will usually overcome a potential violent situation and this is also down to your Taekwondo training.

A person will rarely attack someone who is confident and shows no sign of “becoming a victim”. (The Art of Fighting without Fighting)

A bully will not attack someone who he perceives are capable of defending themselves or where they (the bully) are not able to intimidate that person and could potentially come off worse should the situation escalate into a physical confrontation.

So although you are less likely to become a victim there is no guarantee that a violent outcome will never happen but should that occur your Taekwondo training will give you a better chance to successfully defend yourself, or a loved one, than if you had no training at all.

Should a potential attacker back down when he/she realises you cannot be intimidated then i recommend you let it be and not pursue a physical confrontation (unless of course a crime has already been committed then use your judgement). Remember Taekwondo is only for self defence and if the potential attack is no longer there, to then use a violent reaction of your own could, in the eyes of the law, then put you down as the aggressor and therefore guilty of assault.

It is always debatable whether a person should “get involved” when a weaker, smaller or more vulnerable person is being verbally or physically abused by an aggressor.

I cannot give you that answer, it has to be down to you making what you believe is the right decision at that time. Getting involved especially physically can be a minefield of emotions and possibilities. There are so many “what if’s”:-
What If there are too many of them?
What if i inadvertently seriously hurt the aggressor?
What if they are armed?
What if i get seriously hurt?
What if the Police arrest me instead?
What if they find out where i live and threaten my family?
What if i get hurt or killed, what about my Family then?

The list goes on and on.

All i can say is that if you decide to intervene i hope that you are successful and can diffuse the situation safely without any one getting hurt.

But what if you decide not to intervene and you read in the papers that the person you didn’t go to help was seriously hurt—or worse?

There is no easy answer. In an age where armed assault is becoming more and more common, it is difficult to blame someone, especially if they too have a family, for not getting involved and walking on by. The downside to this is that you now have to live with knowing that if you had stepped in you may have prevented someone being beat up or even losing their life. Ask yourself “if it was me, my wife or my child that was being attacked, would i hope some one would go to my / their aid” ? How would you feel knowing people just “walked on by”.

Someone once said “evil thrives when good men do nothing” and Confucius said “it is a travesty not to speak up against injustice” or put simply, to see bad things happening and walk on by and do nothing. The Bible gives the parable of the Good Samaritan who stopped to help the victim of a mugging when other so called “pillars of society” walked by on the other side of the road and did nothing.

There are numerous other instances where someone stood up to an aggressor and the aggressor backed down and there was no need for a physical response.

Only recently my Wife Rachael heard an elderly Assistant in Tescoe’s being verbally abused and faced up to the bully asked him “who the hell do think you are, what gives you the right to speak to that lady like that?”. After a few moments of staring at Rachael and her not taking her eyes of him and staring straight back, he walked away muttering under his breath.
Did she use Taekwondo?? ABSOLUTELY. If she had said nothing, like the many male employees around then the Assistant would undoubtedly have had to endure further abuse.

This is a familiar story and the majority of bullies will generally back down when their victim refuses to be intimidated and Taekwondo was the difference on this occasion. He didn’t know she was a 3rd Dan and she didn’t say, it was her confident body language that caused the bully to back down. A great example where the physical side of Taekwondo did not need to be used. Lucky for him.

THE ART OF FIGHTING WITHOUT FIGHTING.

This subject alone could be the topic for many thesis’s yet, as mentioned before, no one can give a definitive answer to the question “should i intervene or not”? That is down to you, and only you, at that particular time.

Personally in 40 years of training in the Martial Arts i have only had to use my physical skills on very rare occasions and thank God it worked for me. If i would have had no Martial Arts training—-who knows.

Improved concentration and self esteem

I can only speak from my own experiences from over 30 years of teaching students of all abilities (both physical and mental), ages and backgrounds and state categorically that taekwondo can most definitely help a student improve their Concentration and Self esteem.

Going back to my previous question “how does it work?” is a little more difficult to explain. Unlike the previous ways a student can improve themselves physically these benefits come about more from the “Do” side of Taekwondo training.

I believe that its partly down to the oriental philosophy of Ying –Yang, or harmony / balance. It is the balance of the Masculine Yang (Tae,Kwon) side of the training with the Feminine Ying (Do) side of the training.

To put simply the more a student develops physically the more their Character is strengthened giving them a higher level of self esteem. They find they can do things they may never have thought possible (pass a higher grade, do 50 press ups, run a mile, perform a pattern that they had seen earlier in their training and thought “i’ll never be able to do that”, break a board)etc.
This gives them the confidence to try harder and the harder they try, the more they find they can achieve and so it goes on.

Over time the Instructor will see a marked improvement in their students ability and attitude in class, just how much is down to the individual as no one is a clone and every one learns, develops and progresses at a different rate.

It’s all down to each individuals improvement. A favourite question for a Black belt is “what’s the difference between a Martial Art and a Sport?”.

The answer is that a Sport is a competition between a number of people or teams for recreation or trophies, whereas in a Martial Art the Student is in competition with themselves for their own self development and improvement, physically (Tae and Kwon), mentally and personal character development, self esteem and self confidence (Do).

To put it simply, the more a student can see an improvement in their Taekwondo training, the better they will feel about themselves and their Self Esteem (or feeling of worthiness) improves drastically.

May times parents have come to me saying their child has been bullied at School for a long time but since their child started training in Martial Arts the bullying has stopped. Their child is no longer seen as a “victim” by the bully as not only has their Self confidence grown but also their Self Esteem and they are no longer “easy prey”. On a couple of occasions I have had parents come to me and say their child didn’t fight back when attacked by bullies at School because the child thought I would expel them from class. I said providing their skills were used in Self defence only then I had no problem with it, after all that’s what self defence training is for if all else fails. On one occasion the parent told the School what I had said and explained that if it happened again then their son would retaliate and if he did then he was not to be blamed for defending himself. Previously In spite of the School being aware of the problem for some time nothing had been done and sure enough the bully, confident he would get away with it again went to hit my student who this time blocked the punch and dropped the bully with one hit. The bullying immediately stopped and the parent thanked me for my advice and no action was taken by the School against my student. I’m sure many of you can relate to this scenario, it’s sad but sometimes when all else fails a physical response is all a bully understands and no child should be forced to endure constant bullying be it physical, emotional or mental and if we can improve the self esteem of children then I believe we can go a long way to protecting our children from bullying.

I have even known bullies change their ways because of Taekwondo when they themselves improve their own self esteem and learn some self discipline and respect for themselves and others and no longer need to intimidate weaker children in order to “prove” themselves to their equally inadequate friends.
Improved Concentration

Another subtle improvement in a student’s development is their ability to concentrate better. Be this during lessons or exams, job interviews, driving, even relaxing and not being so disrupted by other things that can prevent them from “chilling out”.

I believe this is down to the mental concentration needed to improve in their Taekwondo training. A student finds that they learn more quickly (and achieve more things) if they pay attention to their Instructor rather than being allowed to mess about and have their mind on other negative things.

Parents have come to me and said things like “his/ her School work has improved since he / she started training in Taekwondo”, or “he / she is not messing about so much at School any more” i’m sure many of you have heard similar things from your students parents.

Why is this ?

First a child is training in Taekwondo because they want to and so will accept the clubs discipline more readily which means they will improve more quickly doing something they enjoy and want to be good at. At School a child is there because they have to be there and made to sit through lessons they may not like so subsequently they don’t concentrate so much and therefore do not improve so quickly.

To say “these lessons are for your own good, so you must try and pay more attention” , to a 8 or 10 year old who probably can’t wait for the bell so they can get outside and play with their mates, probably seems crazy. ( i know because i can remember my School days and my feeling about double maths or physics). However as the child’s concentration in their Taekwondo lessons increases they begin to understand that even having to try their best at lessons they may not like is important and becomes easier that they even surprise them selves when their marks start to improve.

Being able to Concentrate and focus your mind to the task at hand is vitally important if you are going to excel at anything in life, from getting good grades at School to successfully tackling a tricky problem at work or even passing your driving test and i believe that it’s the discipline of Taekwondo training that goes a long way to helping students improve their concentration and go on to achieve better things in their everyday life.
Self Discipline

I have said how I believe Taekwondo training can improve Concentration but what about Self Discipline?

Very closely related to the 4th Tenet of Self Control, Self Discipline is extremely important if you want to achieve the best you can in life.

Self Control is generally explained by the student at grading’s as the “ability to control yourself” and generally the example of “not retaliating in malice should your sparring partner hit you accidentally to hard.” This is true but coupled with Self Discipline this has wider implications.

It takes Self Discipline (self control) to successfully lead your life to the full in a myriad of ways.

Helping people to stand against negative peer pressure just to be “one of the gang” when faced with being cajoled into doing things they don’t feel is right, getting involved with unlawful acts, taking drugs, smoking or underage drinking. Having the strength of character to JUST SAY NO.

From making sure you get up in plenty of time so you can dress and prepare yourself properly for Work / School.

Leaving the house in time to catch your train / bus or have time to negotiate the heavy rush hour traffic so you are not late for work / School. Making sure you have all necessary items for the day. Money, credit cards, office keys, security passes, bus pass, mobile phone, lap top, school books, all home work completed, lunch box, p.e. kit etc the list is endless and all require a level of Self Discipline not to forget these things. Making sure you are prepared for whatever lessons / meetings or tasks you have to do that day.

I’m sure by now you get the picture as to why Self Discipline is so important to lead a successful life.

Living within your means requires Self Discipline, especially in today’s World where credit is so easy to get and debt is easy to get into but very difficult to get out of. If you can’t afford a World cruise then settle for a week in Spain. Also If you can’t afford a £20,000 car then buy a £5,000 car or a £1,000 car if that’s what you can afford, the list is endless on this one but I hope you can get what I mean.
I'm sure many of you would much sooner go home, have your tea and play computer games or watch Sky TV for hours (much more fun) yes it may be but not so important as doing your homework or other far more important things. Even restricting game playing on your computer or X Box takes Self Discipline, to some people these things are like a drug and its not easy to stop and this is where poor Self Discipline can be detrimental to your quality of life in the long term.

It's much easier to win a fight on Mortal Combat than train for months and go out on a tournament square and do it properly, these games are a lazy way for some people to feel good about themselves (beating “strong and powerful” opponents’ on a computer screen by pressing buttons) without the need to even break into a sweat. Doing it for real takes much more self discipline but is far more beneficial to the individual.

Self Discipline is also vital if you want to lead a healthy lifestyle.

It takes Self Discipline to quit smoking, cut down drinking, moderate eating certain foods (especially hard if, like me, you like your food), put the X Box down and get down to the Dojang or Gym and more seriously give up life destroying things like drugs, smoking, excessive alcohol or gambling. To some people they will need professional help with these things but strong self Discipline will be a massive help too.

Goal setting

This is a very important part of Taekwondo training. Having the ability to set sensible goals, then learn what is required to achieve that goal, then work/train with integrity and perseverance until the goal is achieved. Then set further goal and so on.

In the real world the goals can be:

- To pass an exam
- Be successful in a job interview
- Pass your driving test
- Negotiate a pay rise
- Achieve a promotion.
- Save for a deposit for a House or a new car.

Again, the list is endless but for all these things first it's important to set a goal that's realistic. If your goal is out of your reach and you don't have a realistic chance of achieving it then you will get despondent. If your goal is beyond your reach then try setting smaller, shorter interim goals first.
Example if you are a first time buyer and a £300,000 house is your goal but it’s way out of your reach. Your first goal is to get on the “Housing Ladder” and you may have to settle for maybe a £120,00 property to start with, then over the years build up to a £180,000 property then maybe a £230,000 property as your finances improve (hopefully) eventually reaching your dream £300,000 house.

Maybe you would like a Mercedes but can only afford a small Ford, again start small then as finances and circumstances improve you may be able to re-evaluate your situation and get a middle range car then hopefully, if finances permit you may eventually achieve you goal.

*This is also the lesson in Self Control about not living beyond your means.*

At School it is unrealistic to expect a 9 or 10 year old to have as their immediate goal a University place, so the student should have as their immediate short term goals the various intermediate exams that eventually will hopefully lead to their goal of a University place.

Simply put, the realistic short term goals can be a “tool” that can be used to eventually attain the persons long term original goal. Another benefit of this continual realistic goal setting is that every time a short term goal is realised then the persons confidence and self belief in themselves gets stronger and gives them the incentive to go for their next goal.

In Taekwondo most new students when asked “what is your goal in TKD?” will answer “to achieve a Black belt Sir”. Obviously to go straight for the Black belt is unrealistic and the student then needs to realise that a Black belt can be their long term goal but to achieve it they should have the various Coloured belt gradings that lead up to the Black belt as their realistic short term goals.

Years ago there was no such thing as a grading system or a belt system, this is a fairly modern (the last 60 years) development in the history of Martial Arts,

It was originally used when Martial Arts started to become popular in the Western World and class sizes became too big to keep proper control on a student’s progress.

Gradually the majority of Martial Arts adopted some form of standardised grading system. The two fold effect of this was that Instructors had another “tool” they could use to make some money (grading fees).

But by far most important benefit of going through a proper grading system is that it teaches the student the importance of setting short term realistic goals to eventually enable them to achieve their ultimate goal.