

Sword and Spirit

The eNewsletter of Itten Dojo

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— Why Budo? —

Regardless of the times you live in, or the circumstances of your life, success largely depends on things you actually can control:

- **Building strong relationships in a community of achievement.**
- **Forging a disciplined and positive mindset.**
- **Enhancing your physical health and capabilities.**

These are exactly the things membership in a dojo provides.

Life Hacks from the Martial Arts...

Ukemi — The Most Useful Self-defense

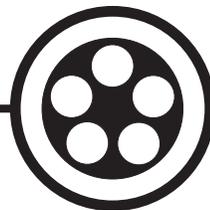
For most modern adults training in martial arts, there is relatively little risk of being physically attacked and forced to fight. Martial artists do, however — along with the rest of the general population — face a nearly 100% likelihood of suffering a fall, with potentially very serious consequences. Preventing those serious consequences is one of the foremost benefits of martial arts training. In fact, for most martial artists, *ukemi* (receiving body) proves to be their most important self-defense technique.

When an untrained person falls, he or she typically extends and locks out straight one or both arms in an attempt to block the oncoming impact, an instinctual reaction that more often than not just adds injuries to the arms to the injuries suffered by whatever other portions of the body land hard. Students of martial arts, on the other hand, train to overlay the instinctual reactions with conditioned responses designed to distribute and mitigate impact forces. Sophisticated ukemi skills allow martial artists to practice safely at high intensity and also develop active counters to offensive techniques.

But what about regular people? The good news is that a little bit of training in a few simple forms of ukemi can provide a significant measure of protection against unanticipated falls. A 2008 study performed in the The Netherlands demonstrated that just 30 minutes of training in ukemi substantially reduced impact forces on the hips in sideways falls for persons with no other martial arts experience.

This article addresses *mae* (to the front) ukemi, a dramatic but not terribly difficult type of breakfall that might be employed when tripping and falling forward. Future issues of *Sword and Spirit* will describe responses to falling to the side and falling to the rear.

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Mae ukemi is best learned gradually. Kneeling, with toes curled under the balls of the feet, tip forward and kick the legs back, to the rear, landing on the forearms and balls of feet, with the face turned to the side (to prevent banging the nose and/or jaw). The arms can land first with the palms, so long as the arms bend at the elbows to allow contact with the ground from the fingertips to the elbows.

Next, practice the same sequence from a squatting position, entering the ukemi by using the legs to push the torso up and out. For most people, this level of practice will be sufficient to start to instill a proper response to falling, the most important element of which is landing on the forearms rather than on straight, locked-out arms.

Depending on the circumstances and surface one falls on, injuries are still likely, but may be lessened by this technique.

Students of martial arts take practice of mae ukemi to a higher level, both literally and figuratively, by starting from a standing position and jumping up and out, as illustrated in the photos that follow.

