

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...

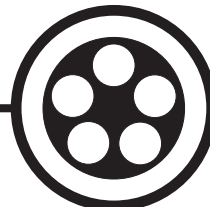
Why Martial Arts are Good for Women

It seems that most martial arts are dominated by men. Statistically speaking (according to a Simmons market research study in 2014), of those who have “participated in martial arts at least once in the past year,” about 52% are men and 48% are women. Any serious martial arts student would consider anything less than twice a week to actually be “not training,” but, I digress. According to those findings, about an equal amount of men and women practice martial arts. Subjectively, however, it looks like men significantly outnumber women on the mat.

There are probably many reasons why this might be.

1. Women, in general, are tacitly conditioned to exhibit stereotypical, feminine ideals — being attractive, quiet, non-demanding, gentle, and conciliatory. For most women, considering a martial art probably never occurs to them in the first place.
2. While men are more involved in child-rearing now than at any other time in history, women are still considered to be primary care-takers of the kids. In order to get out of the house and into a place to train, a woman needs a willing spouse or partner to take over, or must pay for a reliable sitter. Unfortunately, I hear lots of women say, “Oh, my husband would never let me do that,” which makes me actually cringe, or simply state that she doesn’t have anyone to care for her kids, or couldn’t afford it even if she did.
3. Women spend a great deal of time (consciously, or unconsciously) thinking about their safety. If you are a man, you would probably be shocked at all of the things women consider just to take a trip to the ATM, a coffee shop, and the grocery store. It is a challenge for a woman to actually feel strong or powerful. Women don’t think they could handle a martial art.

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4. Building on reason #3, there are just too few women and too many men for a woman to feel comfortable. This isn't anything that has fault or blame attached to it; it's simply a fact.
5. Juggling work, family, schedules, chores, and free time can be hard, especially for women. This isn't to say that men don't struggle with this also, but women can feel like there just aren't enough hours, or energy, to do one more thing.

But, for every reason women might have for not doing martial arts, there are at least two for why women should.

1. It's fun. Women, you may not realize it, but martial arts are just pretty darn fun! It might look painful and dangerous (and, honestly, sometimes it is), but it really is the best thing ever. Doing something physically and mentally challenging, with others who are doing the same, is a great feeling.
2. Great posture. If you've ever really looked at most people, they tend to have hunched backs and curved necks, and look years older than they actually are. Don't let this be you! After a few months, you'll look years younger and taller.
3. Cardiovascular fitness. Regular cardiovascular exercise has many benefits: stronger heart and lungs, reduced stress, increased bone density, reduced risk of heart disease and some cancers, reduced depression and anxiety, better sleep, and weight loss.
4. Muscular fitness. Who doesn't want a stronger body? Martial arts are a great way to increase muscle strength. Doing activities that increase muscle strength can also: increase bone density, lower body fat, reduce cholesterol levels, and help prevent diabetes.
5. It's empowering. Participating and progressing in something that a) few women do, and b) is super-challenging really opens up the possibilities of personal power. Also, here's some food for thought: Almost exclusively among predatory mammals, it is the female who teaches her offspring to hunt and survive.
6. Ability over appearance. The body is an amazing tool. We exist in a world where women are inundated with unattainable images of superficial

beauty. Instead, develop a body that is strong and healthy, and will serve you well. Remember, too, that strong is beautiful!

7. The few, the proud, the women. Despite the slight rise of females in the martial arts, chances are still pretty good that you will be one of a few, or perhaps the only, woman in class. If this bothers you, believe me you will get over it. It is pretty cool to be unique. And it is even cooler when you realize you can hold your own and then some.
8. Yes, you can. So often, women tell me it's really cool that I train in a martial art, and then immediately follow it with, "I could never do that." Yes, actually, you can. You may even find that you are better suited to it than some men. Flexibility, small size, and being light and fast have their advantages.
9. Confidence. When you pursue something that scares you, and then you go ahead and do it, you can't help but feel more confident. This confidence spills over into all aspects of your life. You will probably feel more comfortable asking for a raise, giving a speech, negotiating a deal, being an active participant in a business meeting, dealing with your child's difficult teacher, making big decisions, challenging a charge on your credit card, or returning an undercooked pork chop to the kitchen at your favorite restaurant. You will be more likely to advocate for yourself and those you love, and succeed in doing so.
10. Challenging stereotypes. Anything you do should be done for yourself alone. But, participating in a male-dominated activity shows society-at-large that being tough isn't just for men. Will it be easy? Probably not; but anything worth doing never is.
11. Be a model. A role-model, that is. Every time I pack my kit and head to the dojo, and every time I return home sweaty, tired, and exhilarated (and sometimes even injured), my daughter is watching. She sees a strong, confident, happy woman who is doing something most women don't do. The message she is receiving is, "Yes, you can." And so will you do for all of the girls you know.

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12. Strong bonds. The friendships you make among your fellow practitioners will be unlike any other. There is something about sharing the struggle, pain, frustration, joy, and success on the mat that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

No, I didn't mention self-defense because fighting is the least of what you'll learn. Ideally you will never have to use your chosen art, ever, on the street. You will develop the skills of observation, and the confidence and assertiveness to avoid situations that will actually place you in danger. Though I won't say it wouldn't come in handy if you need protect yourself or your loved ones.

The next step, if you are up for a challenge, is to find yourself a place to train. Ask friends, look on the internet, keep an eye out for seminars or demonstrations and find a few that interest you. Then, call and make an appointment to visit, speak to the instructor(s), and see for yourself. Finally, pick one and join. You won't be sorry. ☸

For further reading:

The Gift of Fear

by Gavin de Becker

(ALL WOMEN SHOULD READ THIS BOOK!)

https://www.amazon.com/Other-Survival-Signals-Protect-Violence/dp/0440508835/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1478544958&sr=8-1&keywords=the+gift+of+fe

The Female/Athlete Paradox: Managing Traditional Views of Masculinity and Femininity

by Andrea Paloian

<http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/appsyh/opus/issues/2012/fall/female>

Marked for Mayhem

by Chuck Hustmyre and Jay Dixit

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200901/marked-mayhem>

Jennifer Ziegler has trained for eight years in Yamate-ryu aikijutsu and was recently promoted to the rank of nidan (second degree black-belt). When she's not training, Ms. Ziegler does, in fact, juggle raising her two kids, managing her husband's psychology practice, and designing digital scrapbooking supplies. All this makes her a very poor housekeeper but, as she says, "Something's gotta give..."

