

## **Meeting The Need Of The New Demographic**

### **The Older Taekwondo Student**

**Presented by**

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### **Meeting The Needs Of The Older Taekwondo Student**

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the effectiveness of my program for my students ages 40 and over. As a Taekwondo Instructor I strive to be the most effective instructor I can be. In order to accomplish this I must identify the most effective ways to develop and teach Taekwondo techniques and have my students be able to execute those skills in an efficient manner. In addition I must address health and fitness levels so the student can continue to improve and participate at a higher level.

Currently there are 31 million people or 12% of the total U.S. population that are age 65 or older. The Census Bureau anticipates that by 2025 almost one in five Americans will be 65 or older. (1) A properly designed fitness program can delay the effects of aging and can improve the quality of life in older people. There are many studies that have shown the benefits of resistance training, aerobic and flexibility on the aging process. (2) A well planned Taekwondo work out addresses all these areas.

Strength training helps offset the loss in muscle mass and strength typically associated with normal aging. Muscle pulling on bone builds bone, so weight-bearing exercise builds denser, stronger bones. In addition the benefits from regular exercise can include improved bone health and therefore reduce the risk of osteoporosis, improved posture stability which reduces the risk of falling and the injuries associated with falling. (3) The best exercise for building load bearing exercise such as jogging, weight lifting, hiking, stair climbing, step aerobics, dancing and other activities that require your muscles to work against gravity.

Aerobic or endurance training is beneficial to cardiovascular health. Reducing risk of heart attacks and strokes as well as other circulatory disorders are associated with aerobic exercise. Aerobic exercise is associated with significant increased brain volume of both gray and white matter in adults aged 60-79 years. (4) Participating in aerobic exercise a minimum of 20 minutes, several times a week, also helps to maintain or reduce body fat to a healthful level.

To prevent muscle or ligament injury, flexibility is a key element of any exercise routine. Being able to maintain or improve range of motion will also assist in balance. Regular stretching is a staple of all Taekwondo workouts.

Taekwondo may be able to contribute to overall health of an elderly population. Such contributions may result from better balance, assisting in fall prevention. Better muscle tone and coordination may also assist in fall prevention. (5)

A typical Taekwondo workout is aerobic, by maintaining a sustained heart rate

for more than twenty minutes. Strength is increased by weight bearing exercises, kicking, stances, plyometrics and resistance with bag kicking. This also enhances balance and coordination. By stretching at the beginning and end of each session in addition to experiencing a high range of movements while kicking, blocking, etc. flexibility and agility are greatly enhanced.

When I began teaching Taekwondo my student base consisted of athletic men and women around my age, twenties. From there I expanded to include teenagers and then younger children. But as I have grown older, so has my student base to include parents and grandparents as well.

My Taekwondo experience spans almost 35 years. I started Taekwondo at the age of 18 at Cal State Hayward under the direction of Professor Robert Zambetti. When I graduated I moved to Sun Valley Idaho and opened my own Taekwondo School in 1978. In 1980 I met Dr. Min at the Korean Martial arts summer camp in Cody Wyoming and went on to direct Six of the Korean Martial Arts Summer Camps myself. During that time I developed four different schools in four different communities in addition to helping start the Boise State University and Mountain Home Air Force Taekwondo programs in the late 1980's. I also built the Idaho Taekwondo Association, which eventually grew to include 10 schools and 250 athlete members. I held the position as state president as a member of the United States Taekwondo Union for 23 years. In 1992 I completed a year long curriculum and earned a graduate degree in Athletic Administration.

As a teacher and coach, meeting the needs of the younger athlete was based on a linear athletic progression of developing strength, flexibility and endurance. Also included was the history of Taekwondo and its dynamic development. Health and fitness levels were fairly easy to deal with. Most of my students were physically active in other sports and used to the rigors of a demanding physical routine. But with older student I must deal with chronic illness, old injuries, arthritis and other issues.

In order to test my effectiveness of teaching I developed a survey for my students over 40 that are under my constant instruction. This removes variables beyond my control. The survey was answered by 20 students ranging in age from 40 to 72, white belts to 3<sup>rd</sup> Dan black belts.

The survey consisted of questions identifying their age, gender and how long they have participated in Taekwondo. Finding out what their preconceived ideas of Taekwondo as well as expectations at that time and how that has changed over the time they have been studying was the next area explored. In addition assessing what their health and fitness levels were when they started and their assessment of those areas now. Next question asked how often they participate in classes per week and what barriers exist that prohibits them from training consistently. Having them identify what their goals where, both short term and long term. These are fitness and personal goals not belt rank. Following they were asked if they felt Taekwondo helped achieve these goals and if the practice of Taekwondo had made a difference in other areas of their lives. Social,

Spiritual, Physical, Mental and their Self-esteem. Next they needed identify any hurdles they needed to overcome in Taekwondo. Finally, they were asked if they would recommend Taekwondo to others over 40.

Expectations of results:

After 30+ years of teaching I am constantly trying to enhance the quality of my teaching. Success in competition for my students has been wide spread and it continued to improve through the years. I developed state champions at junior and senior levels. From there my students earned medals and eventually gold medals at the Junior Olympics. From there the success grew to senior national quarterfinalists and to finally putting athletes on the podium at national championships as well as US team trials.

The other tangible area of success is in student retention. I currently have 40 black belts ranging in ages from 10 to 60 years of age. So why am I concerned with refining my teaching skills? I have always believed and taught to my students to strive to be better and never be satisfied with just maintaining a certain level. So I better lead by example. At 53 years of age I continue to work on refining and improving my Taekwondo skills. So it only makes sense to try and improve the effectiveness of my Taekwondo instruction. I have always believed that confidence is developed by self discipline. Doing what is needed may not always be what you want to do. Having the discipline to be consistent and challenge yourself, will usually lead to success.

My general feeling is that both health and fitness will have improved. I also believe that even though I am dealing with older adults that their sense of accomplishing something new and different will help improve their self confidence and therefore their self-esteem. I also think that I have removed the mystery and media perception of martial arts and replaced it with an understanding of the long and rich history and its role in the development of Taekwondo. In understanding this they may see the importance of its long term development and the importance in recognizing and respecting the time and effort that goes into achieving higher ranks. This I feel will have the greatest impact on my older student's self-esteem as they look back on their own lives and what they have accomplished.

## **Results**

**Gender:** Split 10 men and 10 women

**Ages:** Range 40 to 72

### **1) How long have you been apart of this program?**

Four- Less than one year.

Sixteen- 6 to 10 years

### **2) How often do you participate in Taekwondo classes?**

Average 3 to 4 classes per week.

### **3) What were your preconceived beliefs about Taekwondo?**

75% had no preconceived ideas and came in with an open mind.

25% thought it would be very athletically challenging. Two of these thought only young athletic people could advance very far.

### **4) What are your beliefs now?**

There was an overwhelming response. Taking on new challenges, believing in yourself and rising to the challenges by dedicated yourself to following through. “Over time I began to recognize and enjoy the physical benefits of Taekwondo. Later I enjoyed watching the way it helped young students mature into young men and women by overcoming the challenges presented to them. It wasn’t until recently that I understand that I was also changing and growing by facing those same challenges”.

### **5) Health**

Most of the students considered themselves in good health, 18 out of 20. One of my students had a full heart transplant nine years ago but has no restrictions. One other had heart bypass surgery one year ago and is still restricted from any contact to his chest. Other health issues mentioned but were not considered major problems are: Knee injury (no cartilage), bone spurs, weight, old injuries (broken bones that had healed poorly), and work stress and one cancer survivor.

### **6) Barriers to participation**

Lack of confidence, coordination, church, family, cost (gas) Injuries (aches and pain linger), heart surgery (sparring), lack of flexibility.

### **7) Fitness level**

90% considered themselves to be in fair to good fitness condition when they started. All of the surveys said that their level of fitness improved since they began Taekwondo.

### **8) Goals**

Short term: Improve Taekwondo skills, increase fitness level, improve eating habits, flexibility, rehab injured knee and improve core strength. Regain strength and agility, manage time better so they can come to class more often.

Long term: Maintain fitness level, stay healthy mentally and physically, improve technique and become more confident in teaching. Strengthen family and personal relationships. Stay active in Taekwondo and keep their children involved. To learn to not be so judgmental.

“To attack my advancing years aggressively”

**9) Overall change:** Has the practice of Taekwondo made a difference in these areas of your life?

Social: 90% said it made them feel part of a team and that they felt our club was their Taekwondo family. 10% said it helped their confidence in social situations.

Spiritual: The students with more than 5 years experience stated that understanding the deep and rich history and beliefs of Taekwondo and taking care of others gave them a sense of connectedness.

Physical: Resounding yes in very positive ways. 100%

Mental: All felt that their memorization and focusing skills had improved and enjoyed the constant positive challenge.

#### **10) Personal:**

Hurdles to overcome in Taekwondo?

Nervousness (lack of confidence while performing in front of others), working through physical pain, teaching others, making time to be more consistent, physical (pain from injuries) comprehension and memory. Feeling like a little kid, afraid to challenge one's self. Don't want to get hurt sparring and don't want to hurt anyone else. Flexibility.

Benefits: Strength, flexibility, focus, growing personally, maintain mental and physical agility, fun, more active and able than friends in same age group, increased confidence. The ability to integrate thought and task.

#### **13) Would you recommend Taekwondo to others over 40 years old?**

Yes!

#### **14) Has Taekwondo affected your self-esteem?**

It is gratifying to do something that wasn't easy and then do it well. Improvement tied to setting and achieving goals. It makes me feel adequate about myself even when I make mistakes.

Although I feel that my program is successful, reinforced by the survey, I feel there are areas I can elaborate on and refine. In order for them to understand Taekwondo I feel I need to teach and expose my students more to the Korean culture in addition to the history and why the investment of time is so critical to their advancement. The more you practice the deeper your understanding.

In the area of health and fitness, I need to have them fill out a health and fitness evaluation when they begin. This way I can help individualize a more productive progression for a successful Taekwondo experience. In addition I would have annual evaluations to assess their progress. Next I need to help them understand the benefits of Taekwondo exercise to their overall health in several areas including cardiovascular fitness, strength, flexibility and balance.

What a fun way to delay and in some ways reverse the effects of aging.

Spirituality I feel is an exploration into one's own beliefs. Not necessarily tied to formal religion, but by developing a sense that they are connected to something

bigger. By understanding how the Korean history and culture nurtured and developed Taekwondo, first out of necessity then as part of their development as a person, will help them feel the same pride in perfecting and understanding what they have accomplished.

Taekwondo is an excellent form of exercise for the elder student if it is carefully planned out and monitored. The physical and mental health can be enhanced and the experience enjoyable. By making these adjustments I expect for the elder Taekwondo population in my club to grow.

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