

Chiishi —Strength Stones



One pre-Jtarate use of the *c/iis/ri* can be seen in this example. Here the cross pieces at the top of the handle spin. The implement was used in winding up threads during the manufacture of textiles throughout Okinawa.



Another example of Richard Barrett's adherence to the Okinawan tradition of making tools from resources available. In this case, a length of strong wood and a heavy stone.



Jundokan students demonstrating with the *chiistii*, October 1973. The demonstration was held to mark the 20th anniversary of Chojun Miyagi's death.



Meitoku Yagi teaching *c/rns/if* technique in his backyard *dojo* c. 1955. In the background his son, Meitatsu is seen working with home-made barbells.



tiichi Mfyjiatü (1922-1999), the author's teacher. This photo was taken when he was 52 years old in 1973, The founder of the Jundokan *dojo*, after the death of his teacher Chojun Miyagi (18S8-1953), he inherited all his teacher's *hojo undo* tools.



A couple of old cfrrrshi on display at the Okinawa Karate Museum in Nishihara. Alongside them, a sas/ifu and a twin handle cfrri/jp. An excellent display showing some of the diversity behind the single idea of Lifting a stone.



Takayoshi Nagamine, son of Shoshin Nagamine and present headmaster of the *Mtrtsuboyashi* school of *Shorin ryu karate*, training with the cAifsfir at the Kodokan dojo in Ktime, Okinawa c. 2005.

Tools similar to the *chiishi* have been used for thousands of years throughout Asia and the Middle East. In particular, wrestlers in India have for centuries used a sophisticated array of tools to build, strengthen, and condition their bodies” to ready them for the rigors of the fight. Although many of the exercises and tools differ considerably, the fact that the wrestlers utilized tools in this way at all points to a similarity of thought between them and their Okinawan counterparts. I find it interesting that just as it was the Buddhist monk Bodhidharma* who is said to have traveled from India to China in the year A.D, 520, bringing with him the seeds of what would eventually become the fighting techniques of Okinawan *karate*, the Okinawans themselves would also develop a strong belief in the use of tools to supplement their training and condition their bodies.

On Okinawa, the *chiishi* would seem to have originated from the use of two objects in particular: the small grinding stones used in the preparation of food and the looms used as an aid during the spinning process in the production of local textiles.¹⁰ Given the everyday nature of both these activities, either is a likely candidate for the pre-jfeinitó use of the *chiishi* thus placing the tool in close proximity to a *karateka* wishing to find something to lift.



Eilchi Miyazato was not only a Carafe master (1G-1 to) , but a Kodokan judo 8th Dan who had the rare distinction of having never been thrown in a judo competition.



The author, aged 40, training at the original Shinseidokan *dojo*, c. 1995.



Even in old age, Miyazato sensei shown at 76 years of age continued to practice *dojo undo*.



Morio Higaonna working with two *chirishi* at the same time at the Yoyogi *dojo* in Tokyo c. 1970.



During the same workout, he uses a particularly heavy *choshu* with both hands. Note his impressive shoulder muscle development.



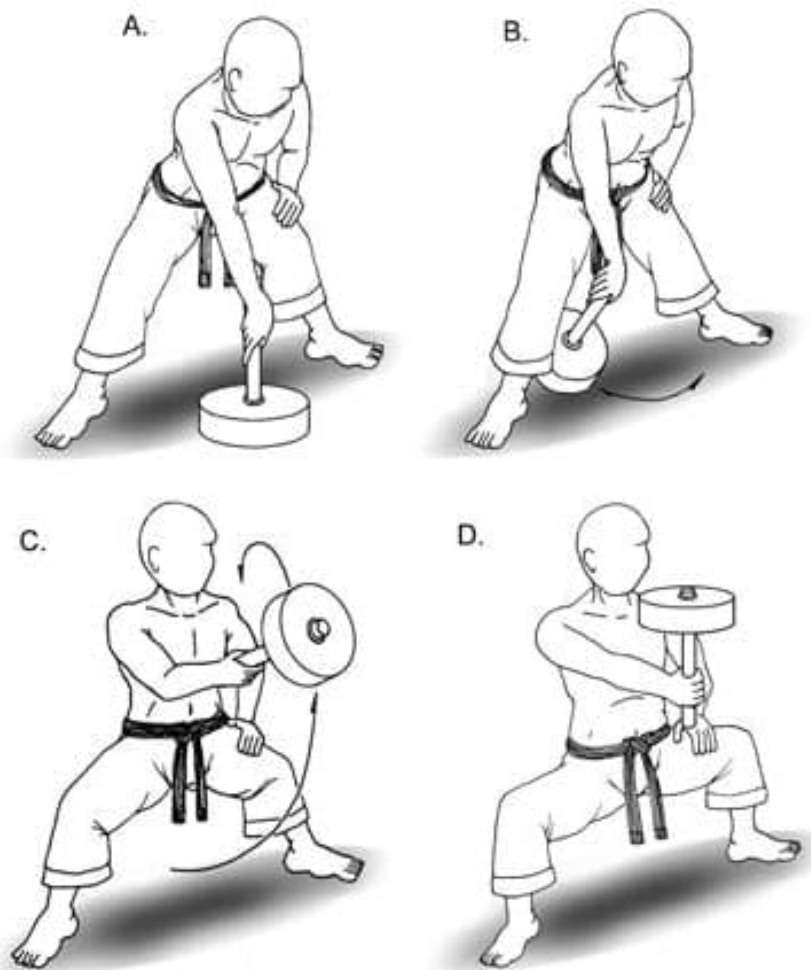
The author training at Mario Higaonna sensei's *dojo* in Kiyose, Tokyo, during the summer of 1986.



Lyn Ang, a female student from Singapore, training at the Shinseidokan *dojo* with a *chiishi* weighing 11 Lbs. (5 kg).

Merely by picking up the *chiishi*, you are working the fingers, the wrists, and the arms, and developing, as you do so, stronger muscles with which to grab, choke, poke, or punch an opponent. Having a vise-like grip is a weapon seldom used, developed, or even sought after by many of today's *karateka* because they focus on the acquisition of straight punches and excessively high kicks. As with every other tool, it is important to develop harmony between the body, the breath, and the mind (intention). If one or more of these elements is missing, the connection between the *hojo undo* exercise and *karate* technique is severely hindered, if not lost altogether. There are many exercises that can be done with the *chiishi*, far more than the scope of this book will allow; therefore only three single-grip and three double-grip exercises have been shown. Each one is performed slowly and methodically with the aim of harmonizing the body, breath, and mind in one single action. Even if these were the only exercises used, the tool still promotes strength in the fingers, wrists, arms, shoulders, and back. The repetitive squatting into *shiko dachi* over time helps to develop stronger legs.

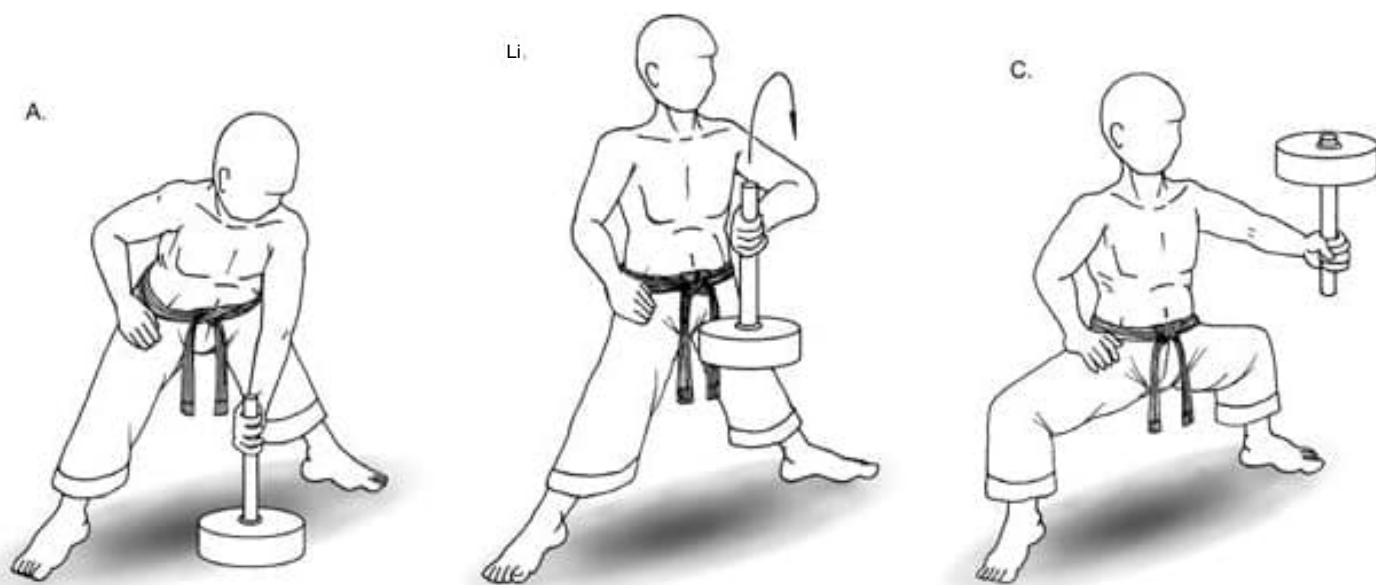
Lifting the Chiishi (Single Handle)



There are a number of ways to lift this tool but the following are two of the most common methods used. The first method is recommended for those who have never worked with this tool before because it makes a less complicated use of gaining momentum to make the lift, though as always, it still requires the *karateka* to develop a "feeling" of harmony with the *chiishi* to prevent it from falling out of control.

In the first method, stand before the tool with your legs open wide enough to drop into *shiko dachi* (Figure A). Grasp the end of the handle with one hand while the other hand rests lightly on the thigh. Then, swing the *chiishi* between the legs to gain momentum (Figure B) before bringing it up in an arc in front of the body (Figure C) and settling down into *shiko dachi*, gripping the ground with the toes while this is done (Figure D). This is the starting position for the most common exercises. As the tool swings upward, inhale and then exhale while the body drops into the stance. Try to keep the posture of the upper body as natural as possible, with the back upright and the arm held out straight. The legs are tensed by pushing the knees backward.

and the feet grip the floor when the tool is brought to a halt in front of the body so that the eyes can just see over the top of it.

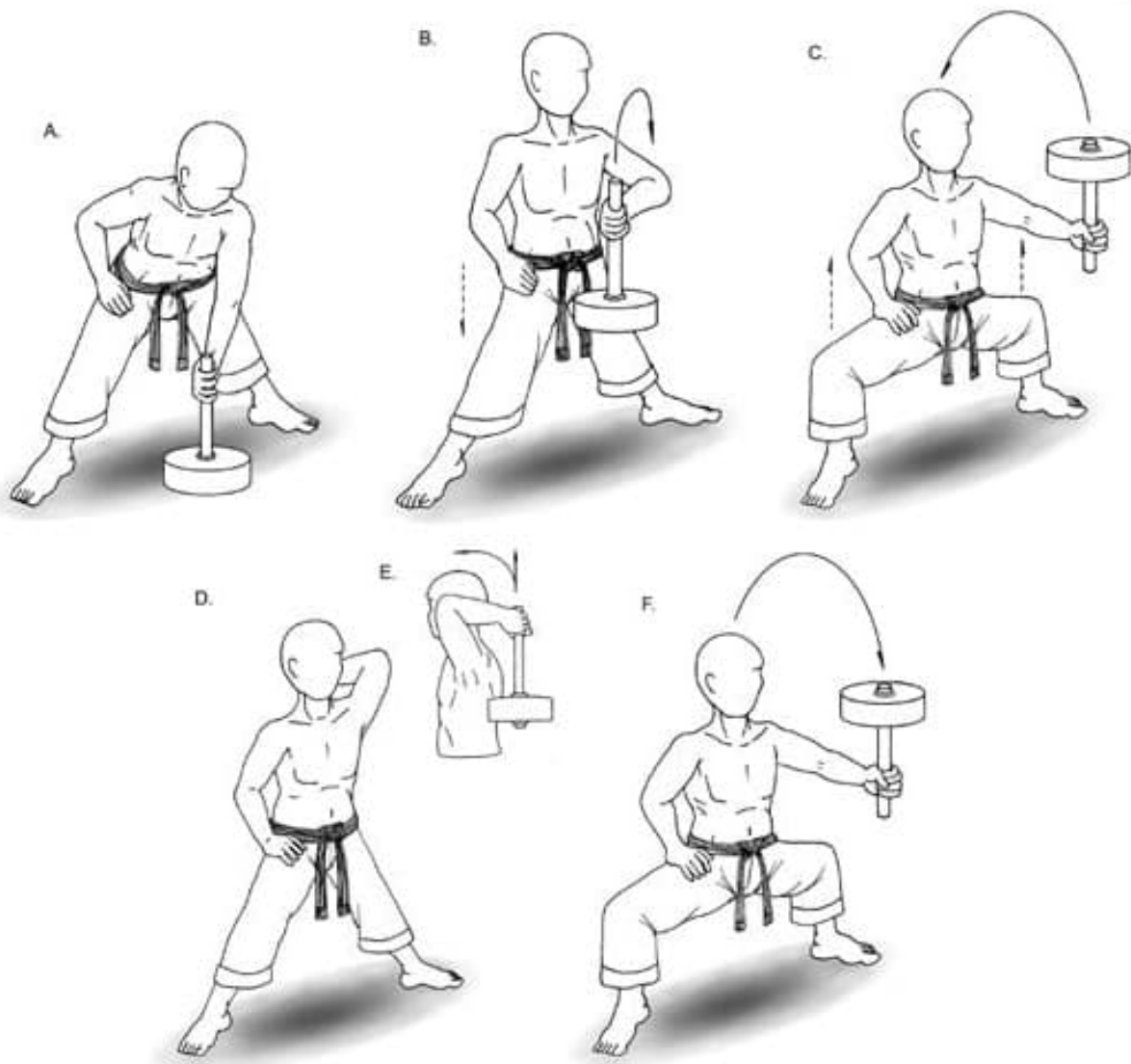


The second method of lifting can be seen at the start of exercise one and requires a little more control of the tool to execute smoothly, the legs and body take up the same starting position as before, but the difference with this lift is in the direction the tool travels and the increased coordination needed between your body and the tool itself, the lifting hand grips the end of the handle while employing a twist along the length of the arm with the palm now facing away from the body (Figure A). Bringing the tool up in as straight a vertical lift as possible, the head of the tool is allowed to carry on upward while the gripping hand is let slip quickly under it (Figure B).

At that point, with the head of the tool above your head height, sit back down into *shiko dachi*, lower the tool, and assume the starting position prior to exercising (Figure C). As before, the upward lift is accompanied by an inhalation, while the exhalation is matched with the downward action of the arm and the legs settling back into *shiko dachi*. The eyes are looking forward, just over the top of the tool.

An alternative way of holding the tool, if the weight of the *chiishi* is a little too heavy, is to grip further along the handle toward the weight. This grip eases the pressure on the wrists and allows the tool to be used. However, care should be exercised if adopting this grip to avoid being struck by the protruding end of the handle.

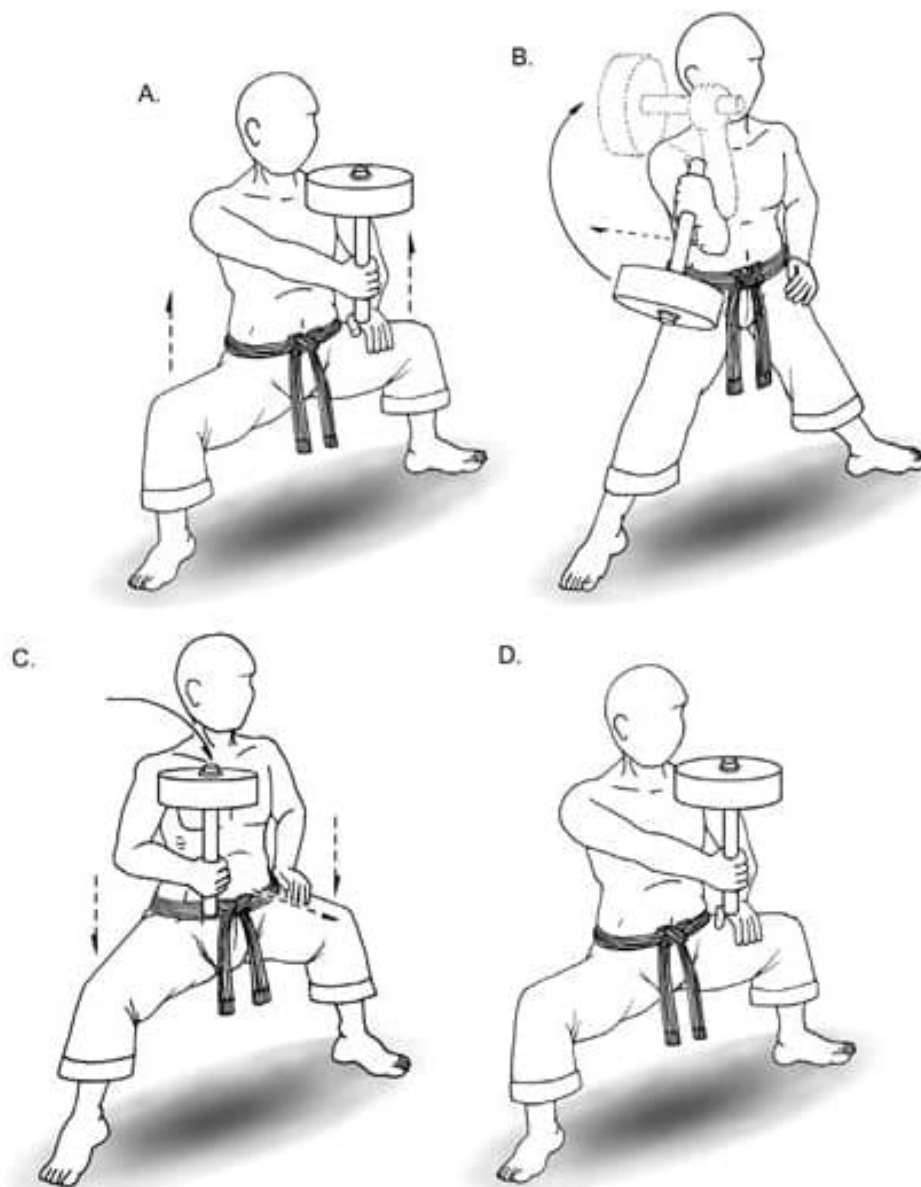
Single-Handle Chiislii



Exercise 1

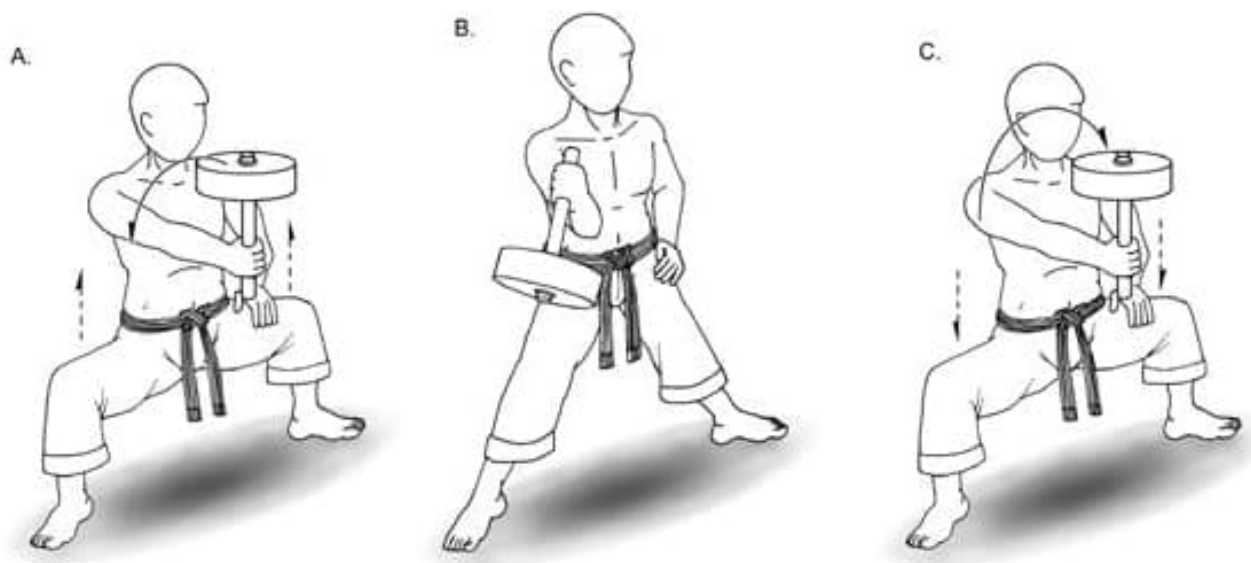
From the starting position (Figure C), lift the tool in a chopping action over the shoulder while you straighten the legs and stand up (Figure D); let the *chiisbi* drop behind the shoulder, relaxing (Figure E) the muscles of the arm while maintaining a tight grip. Take a deep breath in through the nose before breathing out through the mouth and sitting back into *shiko dachi* when you do so, engage the tricep muscles at the back of the upper arm to lift the tool clear of the shoulder and then, in a chopping action, bring it back over the shoulder before coming to a halt in the starting position (Figure F). This exercise (minus the lift) should be repeated at least ten times before returning the *chiisbi* to the floor and commencing the same exercise with the opposite arm.

With all lifts, take care to grip the handle firmly, squeeze the fingers tightly keep the tool under control, and keep the back upright and straight. This may prove difficult at first but with patience and a *chiishi* that is not too heavy progress can be made fairly quickly. Be sure to close the armpit at the end of each exercise to connect the entire body with the tool. An open or relaxed armpit disconnects the arm from the body and leaves the muscles of the latter on their own to deal with the weight of the tool. The open armpit shortens the number of times the tool can be worked due to the early onset of fatigue. This exercise is particularly good for developing strength in the upper arms as well as the shoulders. Of course, every exercise done with the *chiishi* leads to improved strength in the hands and wrists.



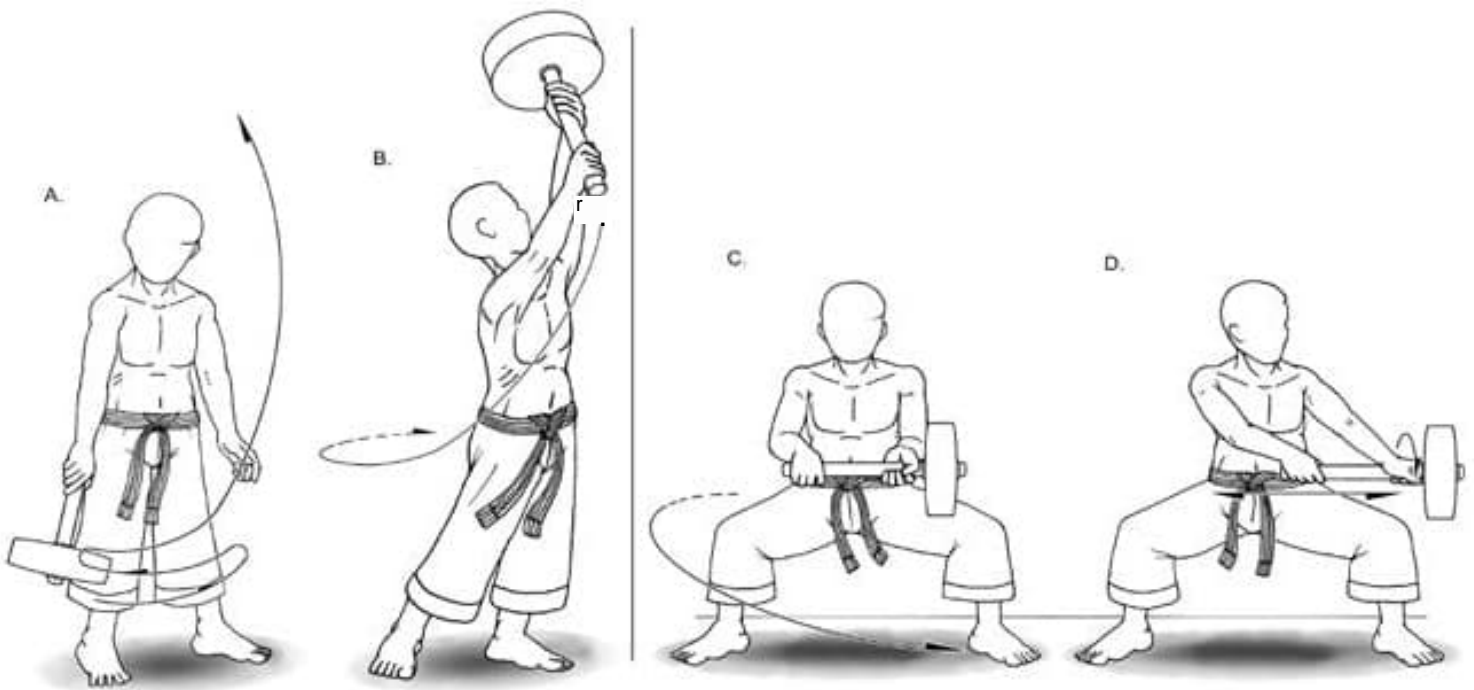
Exercise 2

This time, stand up from the starting position (Figure A), and let the *chiishi* roll backward over the shoulder (Figure B). You should reach the upright position at the same time as the tool arrives at the side of the body (Figure C). All this is done when breathing in. The elbow is tucked back and the armpit closed, similar to a chambered arm in a punching position. Without stopping, and keeping a rhythmical action, drop down slowly into *shiko duchi* while the *chiishi* is pushed straight out to the front, exhaling with the drop (Figure D). The movement and the breath should stop at exactly the same time, and the exercise can be repeated again from this posture, building as you go the number of repetitions in accordance with your strength. The rolling action of this exercise is of particular benefit to the muscles of the upper arm.



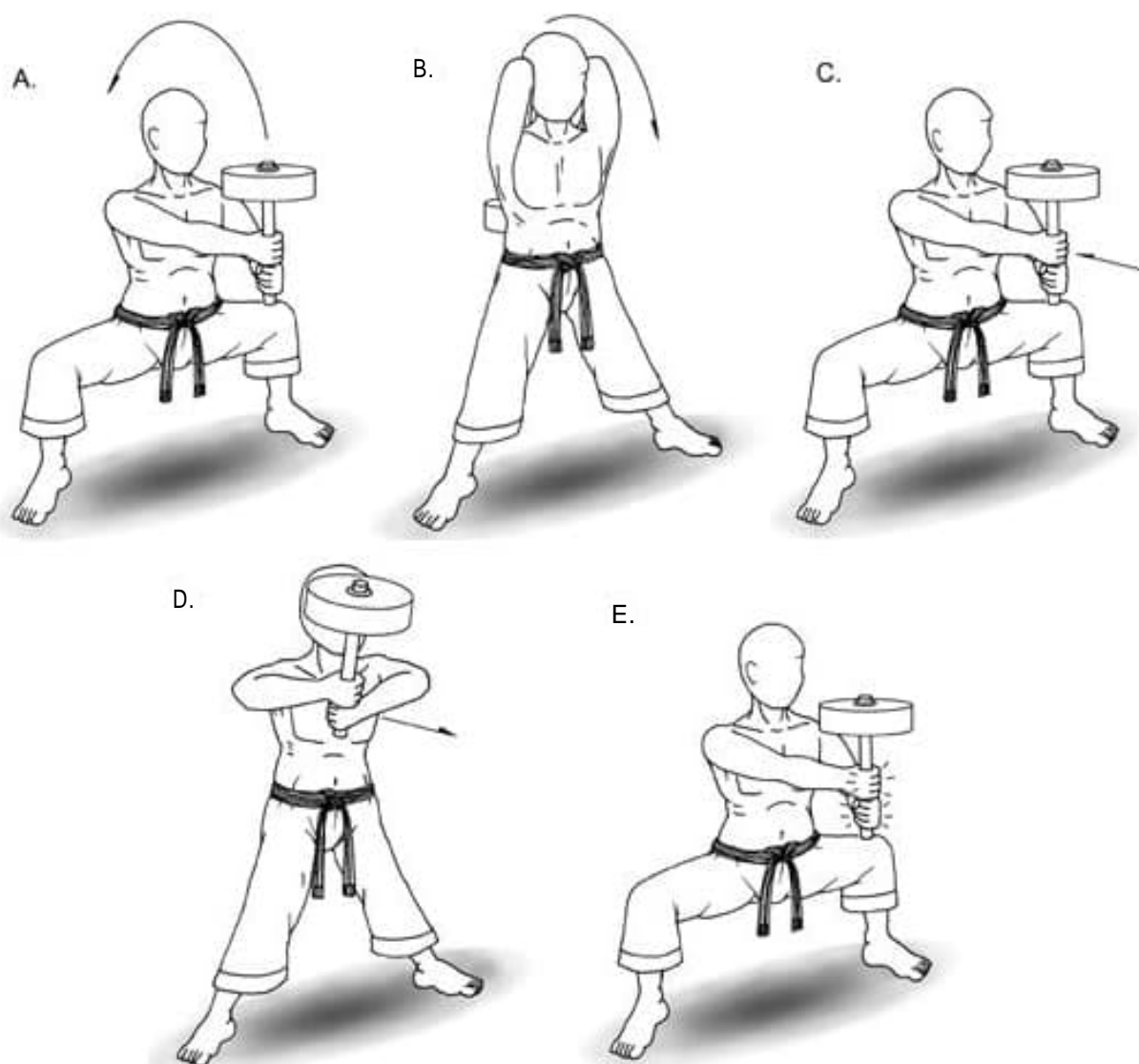
Exercise 3

With this, the last of these basic single-grip exercises, the focus is on the wrist and forearm. From the starting posture in *shiko dachi* (Figure A), stand up slowly and inhale, allowing the *chiisbi* to roll to the outside, resulting in an arm position not unlike that found in *chudan uke* (Figure B). Then, simply reverse the movement and sit back down into *shiko dachi* while exhaling (Figure C). Remember to keep the wrist strong by gripping the tool as tightly as possible with the fingers. Keep the *chiisbi* moving as if rolling on an invisible surface just in front of you and do not let it drop back behind the wrist, because this alters the stress put on the arm and joints. The synchronization of the breath with the lifting and dropping of the body, over time, results in a heightened sense of harmony between breath and body movement, and this in turn enhances the fighting techniques of your *karate*.



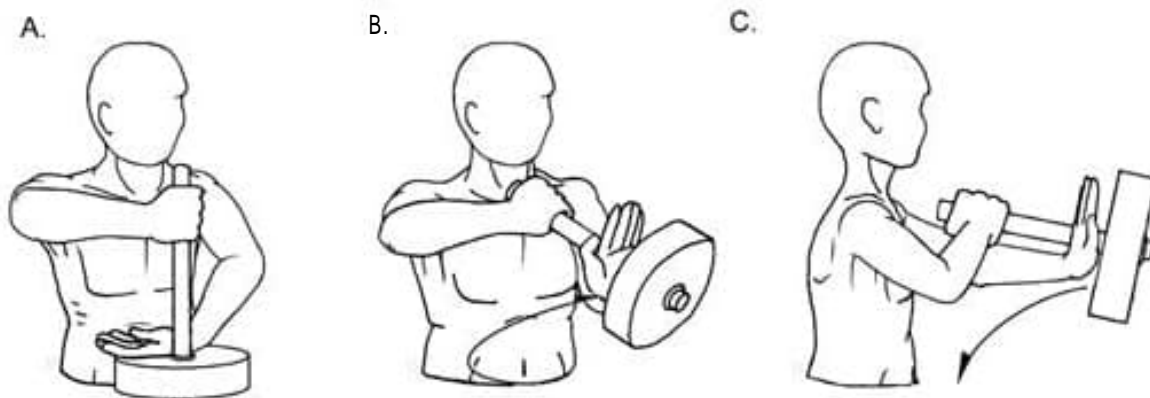
Exercise 4

Begin by holding the *chiishi* in the right hand while standing with the right leg Forward. From here swing the tool back and forth to gain some momentum (Figure A); two or three swings are sufficient before lifting the tool high above the head as illustrated (Figure B). At this point draw a deep breath in while stepping sharply forward (edge on), dropping into *shiko dachi* when you do so and bring the *chiishi* to the position shown (Figure C) in front of the body. From here, three short, sharp, stabbing movements are made over the course of one exhalation. With each outward thrust, the arms are extended and twisted in a similar way to the twist put into the end of a regular *karate* punch (Figure D). On the return, the twist is reversed. After the third movement, simply stand up, step backward, and assume the original position. During this time the breathing returns to its normal rhythm. Repeat at least six times before swapping over and doing the exercise with the left arm.



Exercise 5

Using both hands to grip the tool, place the left hand at the end of the handle and the right hand next to it. Then, in the same fashion as the first single-handed lift, raise the tool into the starting position (Figure A). From there, execute a simple chopping action, breathing in while the *chiishi* is lifted behind the back (Figure B) and exhale while the body drops slowly back down into *shiko dachi* (Figure C). Immediately raise the body up once more, only this time loosening the grip a little, allowing the arms to bend (Figure D). Re-tighten the grip and sit back into *shiko dachi* while the tool is pushed forward once again, but now^r as if wringing out a wet towel (Figure E). This action is accompanied with a strong exhalation. Both the breath and the body movements should remain synchronized throughout. To gain maximum benefit from this exercise, return the tool to the ground after each lift and change the grip over, remembering to maintain a sense of rhythm as you do so.

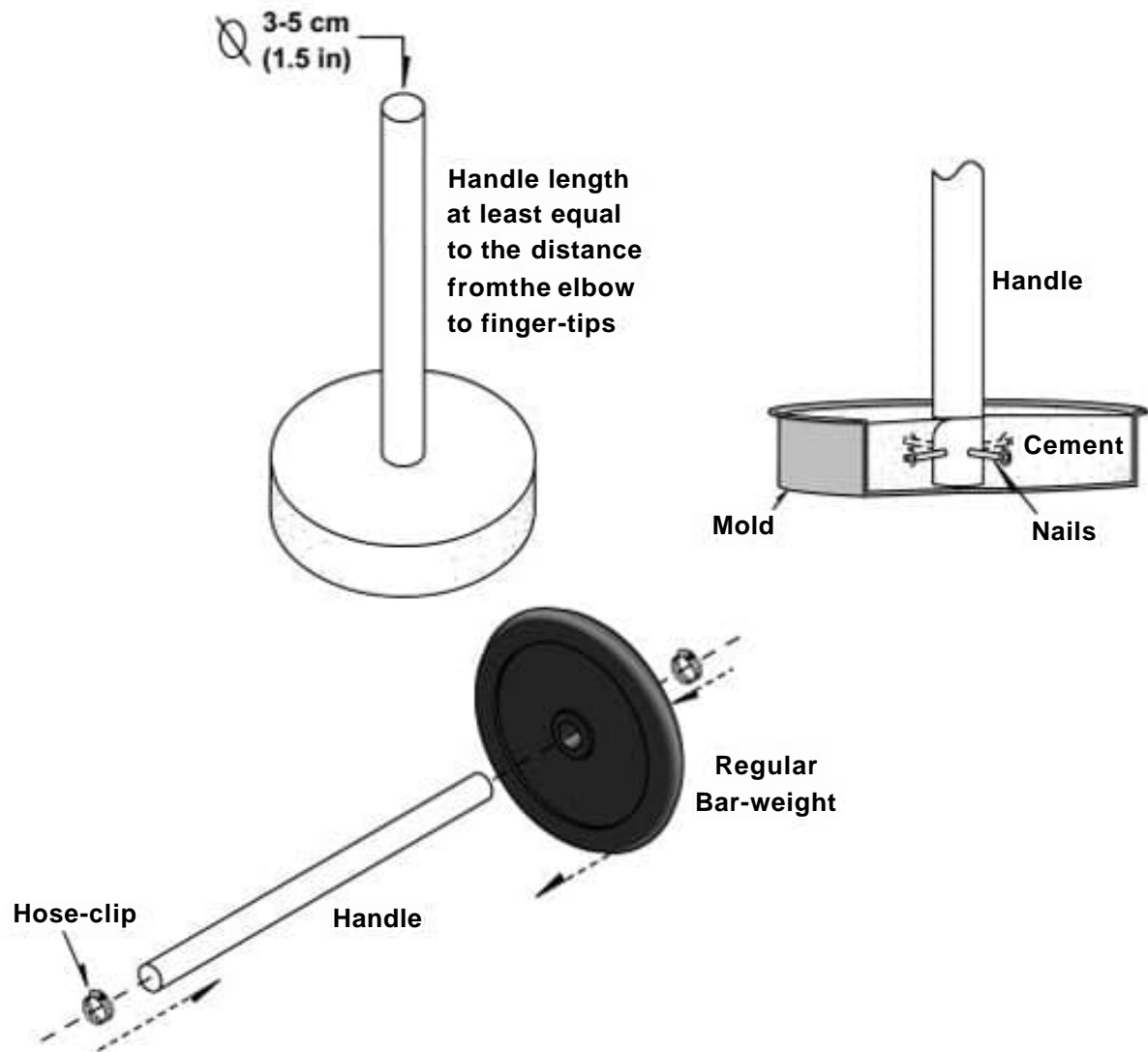


Exercise 6

Standing in *sanchin dachi*, hold the end of the handle with the right hand in the grip shown in Figure A. The left hand is placed toward the head of the tool with the palm facing upward. From there execute a *hikei uke* (open-handed grasping block) action, rotating the hand while the block develops (Figure B). The right hand allows the *chiishi* to move with the block but should not be used to lift it, because this takes away some of the resistance the blocking arm is working against and lessens the benefit of the exercise. An inward breath accompanies the first half of the block, while pushing the tool upward and outward (Figure C). The exhalation begins when the blocking hand returns to the body and the starting position (Figure A).

By using these and other exercises, and with a well-constructed *chiishi* that is heavy enough to offer a challenge, you will steadily develop greater strength in the hands, arms, and legs. Those new to the *chiishi* should consider using a lightweight tool until they have learned to use it safely and only then moving on to a heavier one.

Chiishi (Single Handle) Construction Notes



Nails are Si@d into the dowel before placing it in the mold. Alternatively, hose clips ate placed on both sides of a regular weight.

You need a length of wood that is at least equal to the distance from the elbow to the tips of the fingers, with a diameter of approximately one and one-half inches (3.5 cm). The weight is made from cement poured into a mold and the handle placed in the center. Care should be taken to keep the handle straight while the cement hardens. To add to the grip of the handle in the cement, nails should be driven through the end of the **handle in** opposing directions before the handle is placed in the wet cement and left to dry. The *chiishi* I use in my *dojo* weighs 14 lbs. (6.35 kg).