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PREPARATION EXERCISES

About Junbi Undo

In an Okinawan *karate dojo*, warming-up exercises are known as *junbi undo*, preparation exercises. Within many Western schools of *karate* today; the warm-up exercises often have little in common with the mental activity that follows, neither do they always relate particularly well to the physical demands placed upon the specific muscle groups and tendons throughout the body that are about to be used in the *karate* training itself. While it is not my intention to deny the importance of warming up before *karate* training of any sort begins in earnest, it has to be said that the activities engaged in under this banner can often fall short when it comes to the question of preparing the body and mind for the demands of *karate*. While aerobic fitness and muscular strength are no doubt important, the strong body and calm mind required in traditional *karate* is based on the understanding of your body weight and how, through the connection with the ground and a calm and focused mind, that body weight can be best used to deal with and manipulate the force of an attack. While all hell may be going on around us, we strive to remain calm inside. In *karate*, we try to be the eye of the storm.

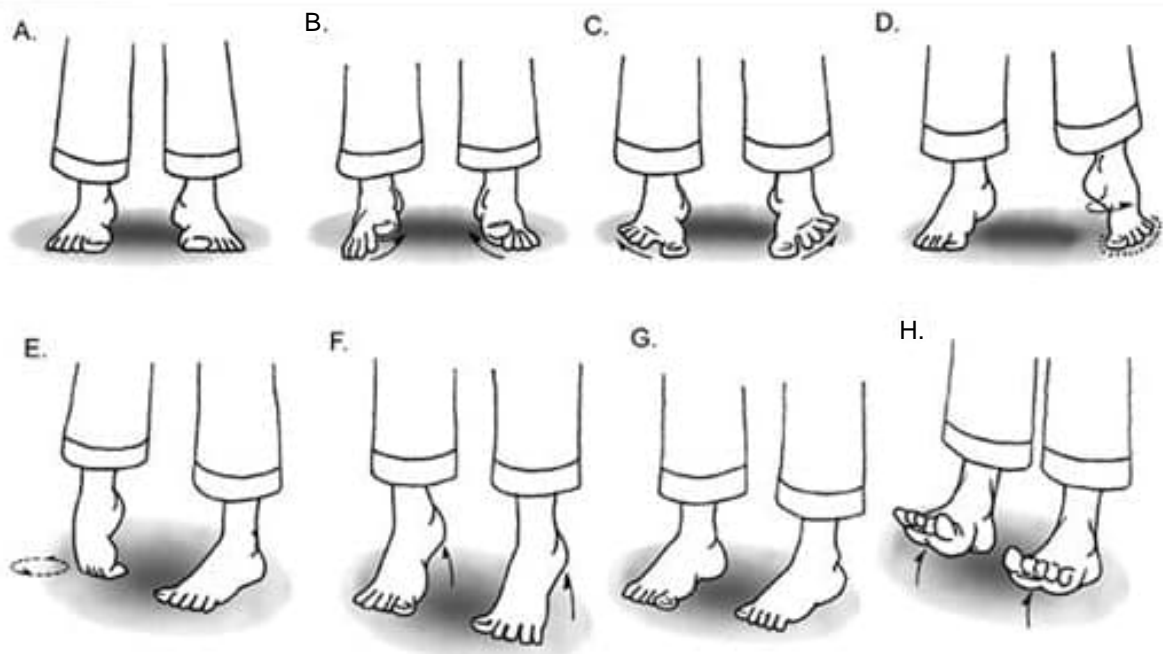
Within the *Goju ryu* tradition of Okinawan *karate*, a series of exercises have been handed down since the days of Chojun Miyagi, the traditions founder. These exercises are intended to not only warm up the body, making it ready for training, but also to engage the particular muscles and tendons used in the various techniques of *karate*. They also play an additional role of focusing the mind on a particular part of the body as the routine is worked through, thus giving an early appreciation for some of the postures and “feelings” you are searching for in your *karate* technique. Because almost all of the techniques of *Goju ryu karate* are shared to some extent by other schools of martial arts, this set of *junbi undo* exercises should not be considered as being solely beneficial to *Goju ryu* practitioners alone.

In the main, there are two kinds of *junbi undo* exercises. The first stretches the muscles and tendons and loosens up the joints, which helps to promote suppleness and increase the range of motion in the moving parts of the body. This group begins to stir the blood and raise the body's temperature. The second group of exercises is done to build strength and stamina in the major muscle groups of the body and to increase your mental powers of endurance. Over time, these two forms of *junbi undo* combined enables the techniques of *karate* to be performed well within the range of the *karateka's* mental strength and physical suppleness. This in turn allows him to move freely and without the stresses imposed on a less supple or healthy body. The mind as well, familiar with the

limits of the body, is calm and more able to achieve that relaxed state of concentration needed to deal successfully with conflict.

Beginning with the toes and working vertically up through the body to the neck, the first set of exercises is an excellent way to prepare both physically and mentally for the rigors of the training to come and to point your attention directly toward specific postures and positions encountered later in the actions of *karate*. These exercises, or something like them, should be considered as much a part of your *karate* training as a block, a punch, or a kick. What follows are the drills I teach and are practiced in my *dojo* before every training session. Even when the entire training is given over to *hojo undo*, these exercises are still done because students should never attempt to lift heavy weights from scratch without preparing their body and mind in some way first. To do so is to invite the possibility of torn muscles, tendons, or perhaps even something worse. The fibers of the muscles work better when prepared; so remember, you shock them into activity at your peril. All these exercises should be considered general warming up drills, albeit specific to *karate*. To improve your flexibility and muscular strength to their full potential, you should seek expert guidance from a qualified teacher of yoga, gymnastics, or weightlifting.

Junbi Undo Preparation Exercises



Junbi-Undo 1

Begin by standing in *heiko dachi* (natural stance. Figure A), resting the hands on the hips, and focusing your attention on the soles of the feet (*teisoku*). Spread the toes as widely as possible and try to make as much surface contact with the ground as you can.

From here lift up your big toe (Figure B) and hold for a second before returning it to the ground, gripping the floor, and lifting the smaller toes (Figure C) off the ground. This exchange is repeated at least ten times. The big toe up position is the same posture made with the foot when kicking *yoko geri* (side kick). With the big toe down and the small toes up, this foot position is used in *kata* when turning front on from a sideward stance, as in the *gekisai kata*, i.e., when moving from *heiko dachi* to *sanchin dachi* after the *jodan shuto uchi* (head height open-hand strike). It is also found toward the end of the *kata saifa* when moving on from the second *chudan urazuki* into *sanchin dachi*, to throw *hidari jodan gyaku zuki* (left side head-height punch).

Standing in *heiko dachi* (Figure A) and placing your weight on one leg, raise the opposite heel and grip the floor with the toes with as much strength as possible. Twist the heel inward toward the standing leg (Figure D), but do not allow the toes to lose their grip; hold for four or five seconds before releasing the tension. This twisting exercise should be repeated at least ten times with each foot. Over time, this drill increases the strength of the toes and improves their overall dexterity. This is important in *karate*, as often within *kata* subtle control tactics using the toes are employed.

One example occurs immediately after the kicks in *the gekisai kata*, and in the *Goju ryu kata suparinpei* where they precede the *awase zuki* (double punch) is yet another. In these and other *kata*, the toes are placed on the opponents foot to keep him from retreating and to hold him there for the strike that follows. During this time, the big toe is used to apply pressure on a vital spot just above the opponent's toes (*kori*).

Placing your body weight on one leg, roll the toes of the opposite foot back and forth on the floor before making a circular motion (Figure E). Allow some weight to be brought to bear on the toes being rolled and take care to roll the big toe. This exercise increases your awareness of the toes and improves the overall dexterity of the big toe, a weapon so often left out of the *karate* arsenal, and yet, one that can have a mind-numbing effect when applied correctly as described in the previous exercise. Our big toe also provides us with the ability to balance properly and our understanding of its relationship with the ground is vital for our stability'.

With the hands resting on the hips, raise the body up onto the balls of the feet (*koshi*) and hold for two or three seconds (Figure F). This posture works the tendon at the back of the ankle (.Achilles tendon), stretches the calf muscles, and aids in the acquisition of good balance.

Placing the feet back on the floor (Figure G), rock backward on the heels (Figure H) before returning to the original position on the balls of the feet. Warming up the tendons and calf muscles of the leg, the first posture on the balls of the feet is also the foot position found in a *karate* front kick (*mae geri*). When on the heels, this foot position is found in the *Goju ryu kata seisan*, toward the end when kicking with the heel into the lower torso or bladder of an opponent (*kakato geri*). In the *Shotokan kata unsu*, this kind of kick is also used to great effect about two-thirds of the way through the *kata*? although in that particular school of *karate* the technique is also known as *kesage geri*.



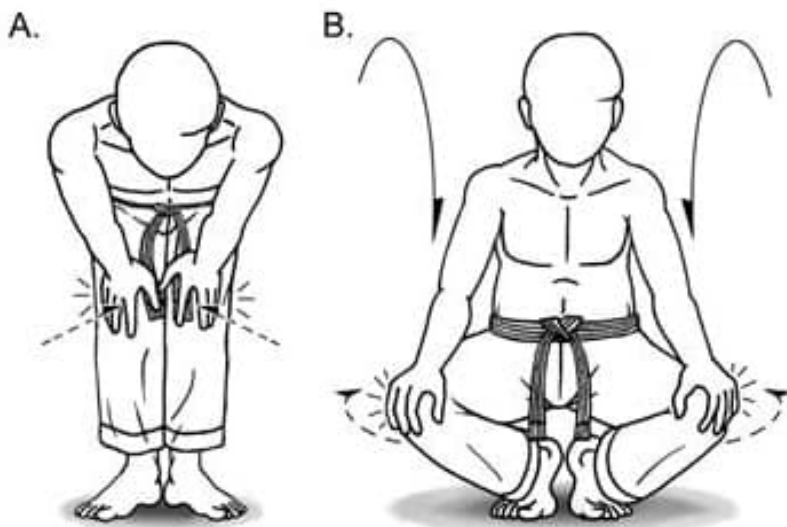
Jnnbi-Undo 2

Keeping the armpits closed tightly, hold the aims out in front of the body with the **palms of the hands** open and firm. Springing off the floor **with** the ankles, shoot the knees, alternately, into the open hands in a steady and **rhythmical way** making as much impact with the palm of the hand as possible. This movement not only prepares the legs for action later in the *kara-te* training propen but also helps spotlight the actual mechanics involved in the execution of a kick with the knee (*heiza gert*).



Junbi-Undo 3

Returning the hands to the hips, stand on the left leg and raise the right knee so that the thigh is level; doing this helps develop balance. Rotate the ankle, first clockwise and then counterclockwise. Then flick the bottom part of the leg out as if kicking. Keep the leg relaxed while you do this and remember to form the foot properly as if doing a *karate* front kick (*mae geri*). Repeat this by standing on the right leg and raising the left knee.



Junbi-Undo 4

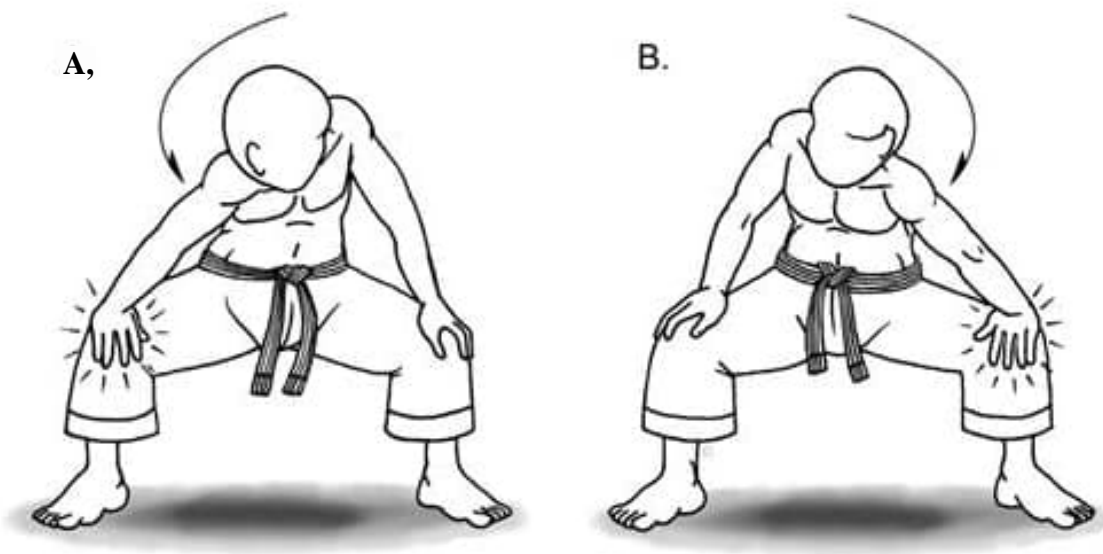
Place the feet together with the heels touching and the toes apart making a V-shape with the feet (*musubi dachi*). Leaning forward, the hands are placed on the knees, where a little pressure is brought to bear to push them backward (Figure A). At this point, be sure the toes, especially the big toe, stay firmly on the ground, gripping the floor. The big toe provides us with the ability to balance properly, and a strong connection to the ground with this particular digit is therefore essential.

Bend the knees and drop the body down into a squatting position, keeping the back straight and the knees out to the sides as the heels leave the floor (Figure B). Remain in this posture for a few seconds before returning to the starting position. Tie bending and standing is repeated at least ten times, and care should be taken not to over-extend the knee joint by dropping too quickly into the squat. The hands remain on the knees throughout.



Junbi-Undo 5

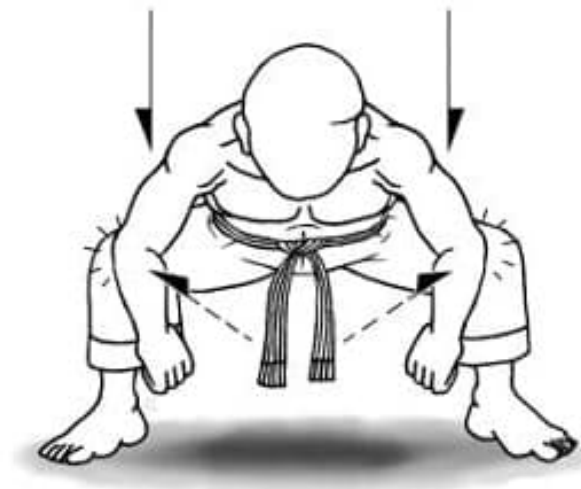
On the final squat, hold for at least thirty seconds. Push the knees open and back, and keep the back straight: now close your eyes. After thirty seconds, open your eyes and stand up. This exercise helps develop balance while strengthening the toes and is exactly the posture (stance) required in the *Goju ryu kata kururunfa*. Toward the end of the *kata*, a 180-degree turn is performed bringing the *karateka* into *tnHsubi dachi* (V-shaped stance) before dropping immediately into *koshi dachi* (squatting stance—standing on the balls of the feet). In the *kata*, this stance facilitates a throwing technique.



Junbi-Undo 6

Step out into *shiko dachi* (low stance) and place the hands on the inside of the thighs close to the knees. Drop the right shoulder forward, turn the head gently, and look to the left (Figure A). The right arm now pushes the right leg backward while the left arm checks the left leg from moving forward. Again, take care to keep the toes of both feet firmly gripping the floor throughout this exercise.

The stretch should be felt along the top of the inner thigh and should be held for several seconds before switching over and repeating on the opposite side of the body (Figure B).

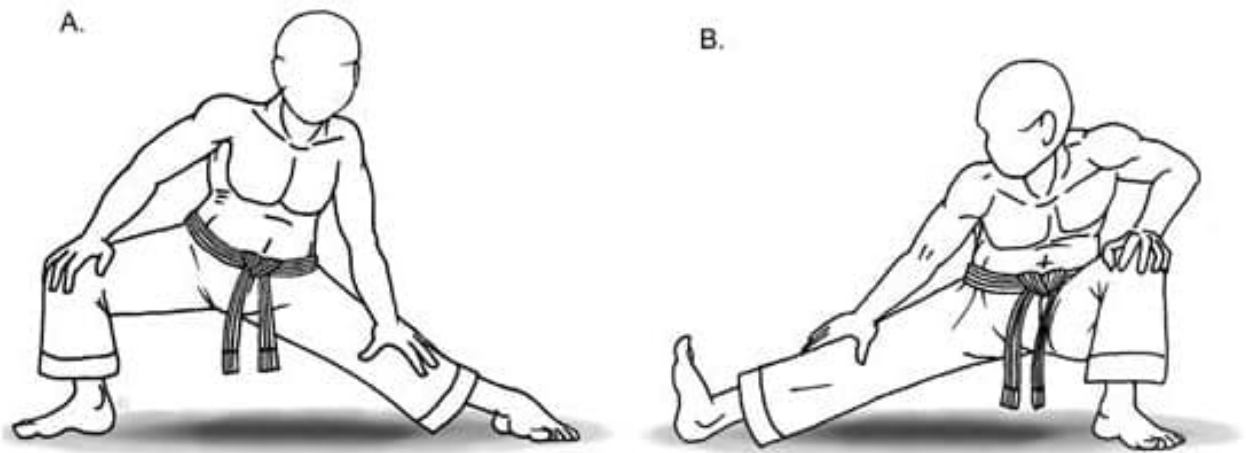


Junbi-Undo 7

Staying in *shiko dachi*, run both forearms down the inside of the legs until the elbows are slightly above the knees. Bring an equal pressure to bear on both legs to push them apart. With the toes gripping the floor, hold the chest up, as upright as possible, to maximize the stretch on the legs. Hold for at least ten seconds.

A timely reminder here—all stretches should be done with care and never rushed. Regardless of how flexible you might be, never drop into or come out of a stretch quickly. Always perform these actions slowly and methodically, and take care of your body.

When moving in *shiko dachi* (Low stance), it is important not to Lean with the shoulders first or to simply spin one Leg around the other. Although there are some occasions where a spin is used, it is specific to the techniques being performed. Moving incorrectly in relation to the technique we are trying to do takes away control and the loss of control hinders our ability to affect the outcome properly, as well as the opportunity to adapt should the need arise. In this case, the body should remain upright while the weight transfer is taken care of by the Legs when the "stepping" Leg pushes the weight onto the "standing" leg before moving quickly to its next Location. The result of moving from one posture to another, regardless of which method is being employed, should be predictable and never Left to chance. Along with poor control of our own body comes a

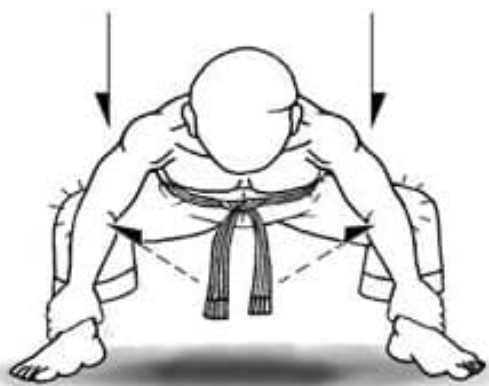


Junbi-Undo 8

Lean onto the right leg and keep the left leg stretched out, with the foot and toes flat on the ground (Figure A). Rest the hands on the knees and try to maintain an image of the calf muscles being stretched by your posture. Without raising the body, move across onto the opposite leg, not by leaning, but by isolating the leg muscles and making the bent leg move the weight of the body across to the other side in as level a manner as possible. The idea is to recognize the exchange of your body weight from one leg to the other. This “feeling” is necessary in many *Goju ryu kata*, but particularly so in the *kata seiyunchin*. Hold the posture on either side for several seconds before moving back across in a steady manner. Ten repetitions on both sides gives the legs a good workout.

Moving directly on from the previous exercises and into this one, drop the body down into a lower (squatting) position and allow the foot of the outstretched leg to rest on the heel with the toes pointing upward, while keeping the foot of the squatting leg flat on the floor (Figure B). "The stretch has moved now from the lower leg to the upper leg and with the lower center of gravity now involved, the feeling of transferring your weight increases; doing the exercise correctly strengthens the legs.

diminished ability to control someone else. It is important to remember that at the core of *karate* training is the challenge to control ourselves first. This speaks to our mind as well as our body and perhaps sheds light on why complete mastery of *karate* is an achievement accomplished by so few.



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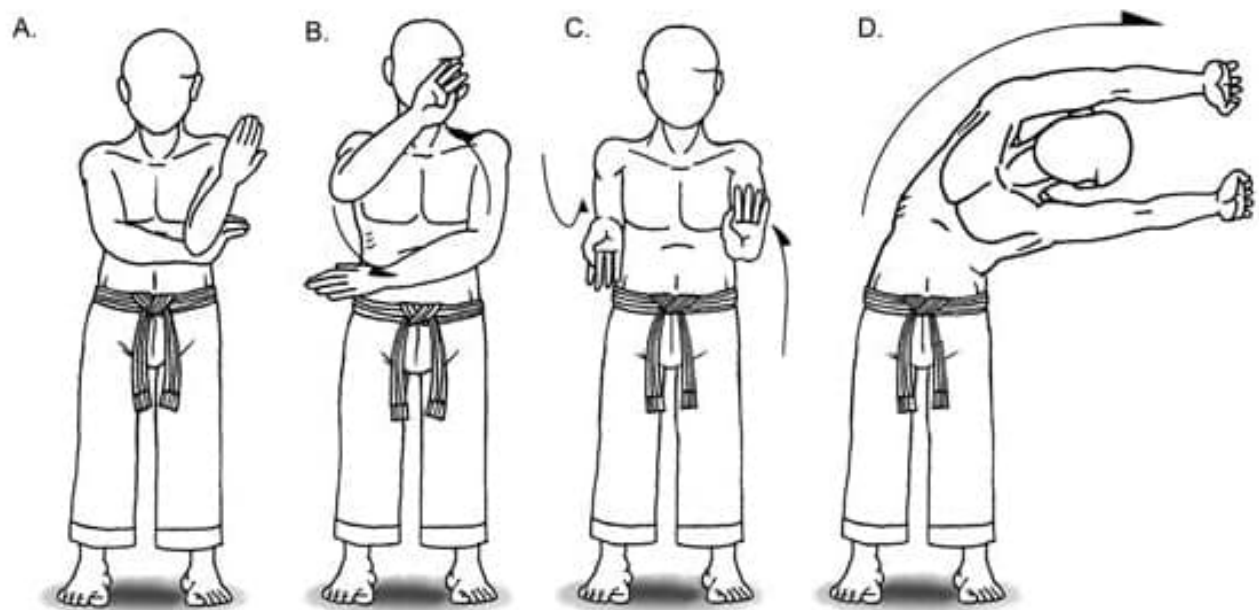
With the legs having now had a good stretch, return to *shiko dachi* once more; place the elbows on the inside of the knees and push backward, remembering to keep the body as upright as possible and to grip the floor with the toes. Extra leverage may be gained by grasping the ankles with the hands.



Junbi-Lindo to

Standing in *heiko dachi* (natural stance) with the hands resting lightly on the hips, rotate the hips in a circular action. Try to keep the ankles and shoulders in line and confine the movement to the central part of the body minimizing as much as possible any movement of the shoulders; rotate the hips both clockwise and counterclockwise.

Within *Goju ryu karate* there is a method of turning that requires a strong twisting action, and this can be seen in the *kata*: *sanchin dai ni*, *serifa*, *seiyunchin*, *sanseiru*, *seipai*, *seisan* and *suparinpei*, where the successful execution of the technique immediately following the turn is directly Linked to the amount of torque built up in the body immediately prior to the turn. If the shoulders and the hips twist on a different axis during the turn, then the transfer of energy is Lost while the body becomes unstable and Loss of balance occurs. Under these circumstances, the technique is almost certain to fail.

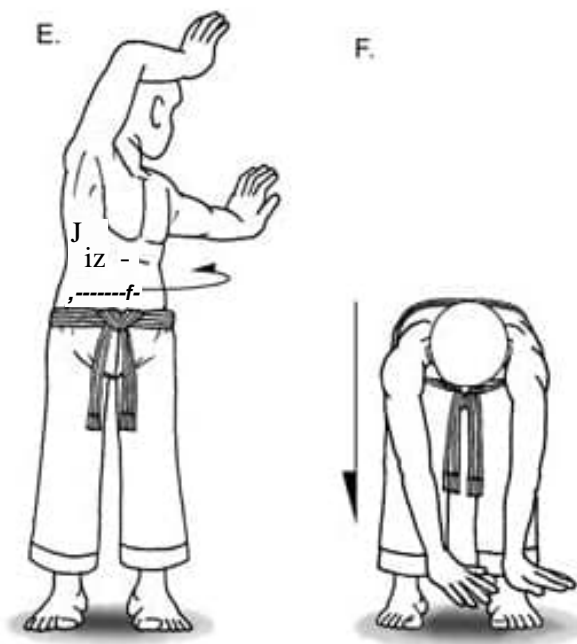


Junbi-Undo 11

Standing in *heiko dachi* (natural stance) hold the left arm in a *chudan haito uke* (mid-level thumb-edge hand block) posture (Figure A) and support it by placing the right hand, palm facing down, under the elbow. From there inhale deeply through the nose while you perform *mawashi uke* (circular block, Figure B) and come to the position seen in Figure C.

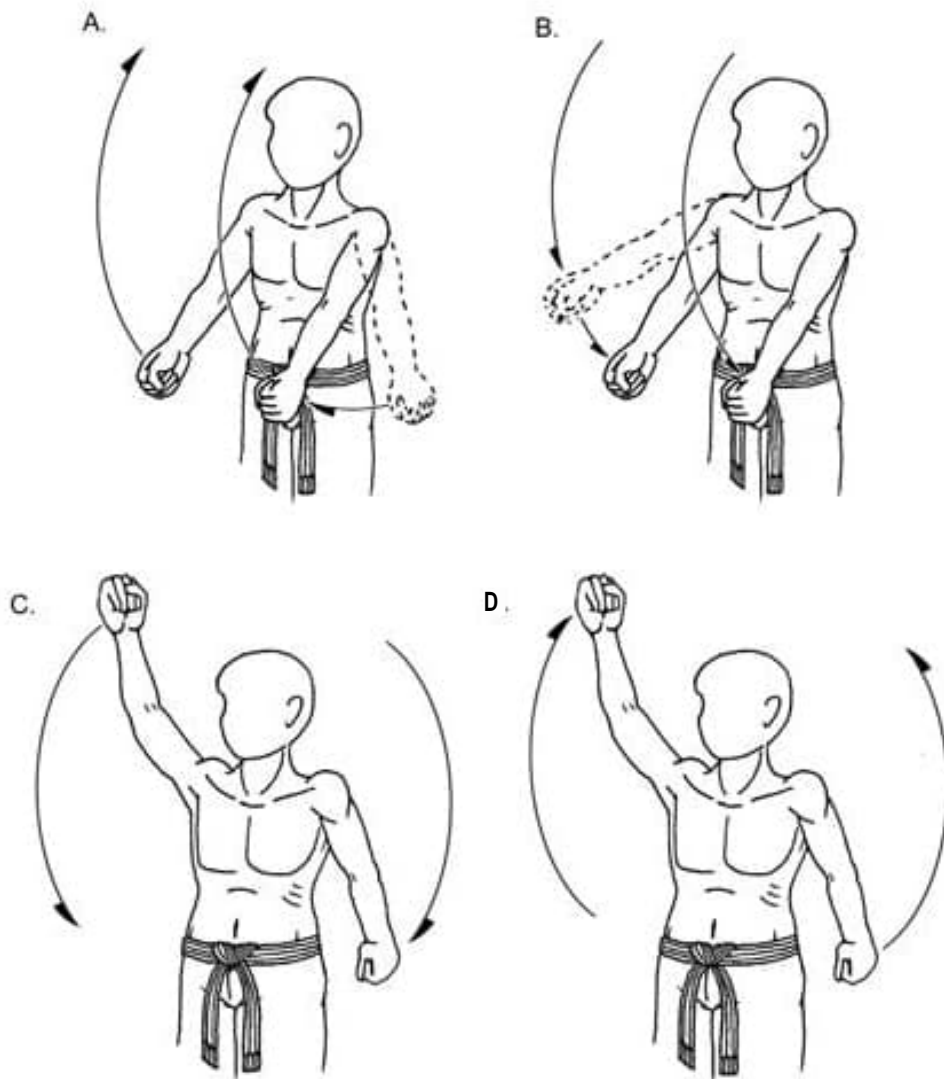
Keeping the body and head facing forward, bend at the waist to the left, and with a strong exhalation through the open mouth, push the arms to the side (Figure D). The breath should be synchronized with the movement, as it is in *sanchin kata*, and should begin and end together. Inhalations accompany the *mawashi uke* movements, while the exhalations are matched with each stretch. Return to the start position, switch hands, and repeat the exercise to the right.

Although found in many *kata* throughout the *Goju ryu* system, and in the *kata* from many other schools of *karate*, the *mawashi uke*, *torn uchi* (circular block, tiger strike) combination is always connected to a particular breathing pattern: inhaling with the block, and exhaling with the strike. In some *kata*, these actions are performed quickly, while in other *kata* they are performed with a heavy, deliberate feeling. Nevertheless, the combination of physical movement and coordinated breathing is nowhere better felt than during *sanchin kata*. Here, the slow movements and the deep breathing concentrate the sensation of harmony between the physical and the cerebral. Together, this combination often leads to results that amount to more than the sum of its parts.



As well as stretching to the sides, a backward (Figure E) and forward (Figure F) stretch is also performed. Always beginning from the same posture (Figure A) and performing *mawashi uke* before moving in the same direction as the arm being held out in front, the backward twist should be done with care taken to keep the body upright as if twisting on a vertical alignment that runs directly through the center of the body.

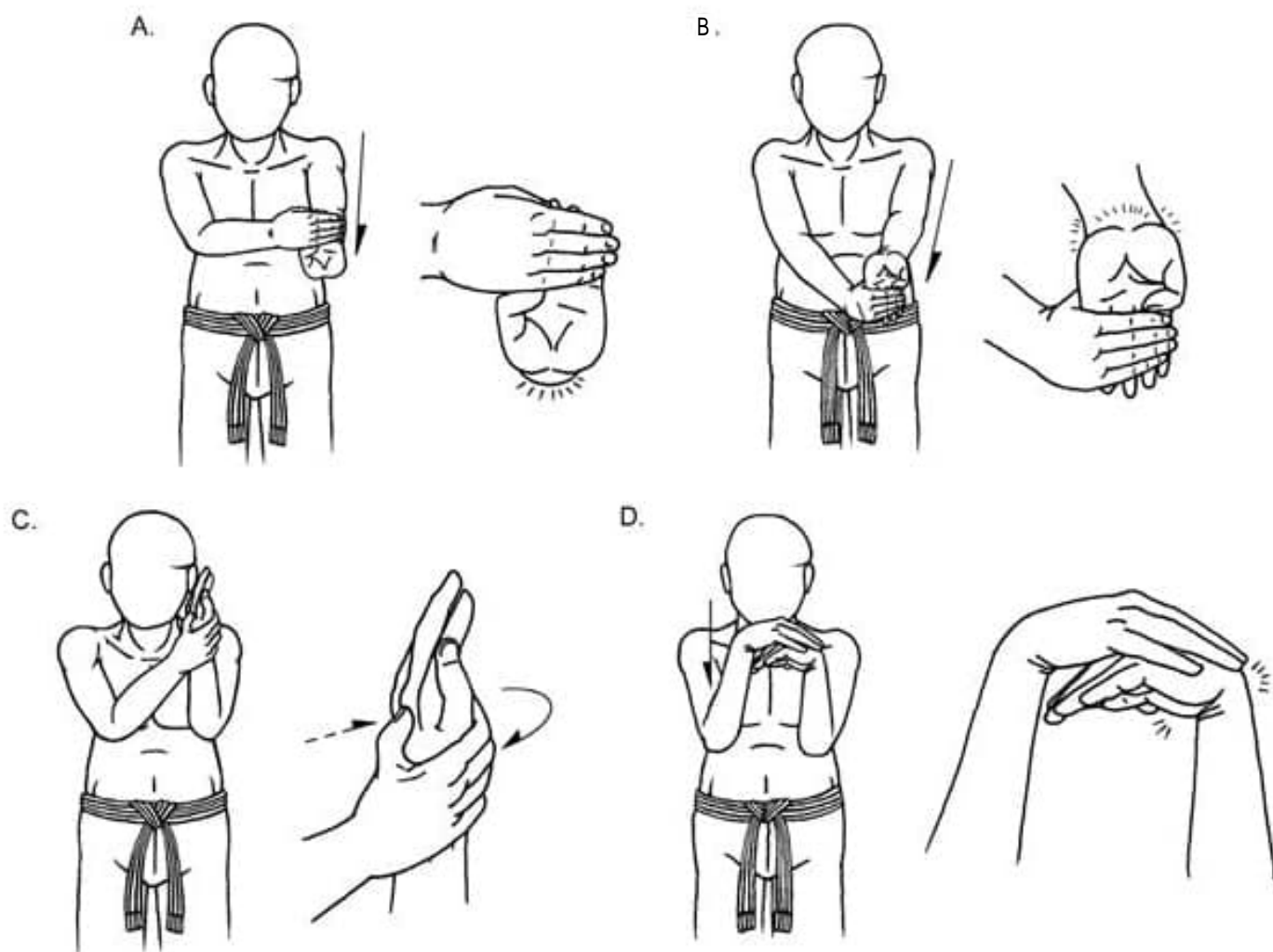
Arm swings (next page), with the hand formed into a fist, are found in the *Goju ryu kata, saifa*, as well as in the opening sequence of the *Shotokan kata, chinte*. It is yet one more technique that is common to many schools of *karate* and no doubt harks back to a time before individual schools existed. In spite of the often-ingrained ideologies that exist in the minds of many followers of today's *karate* styles, the physical evidence is all around to show how such thinking is fundamentally flawed.



Junbi-Undo 12

■Stand naturally and swing the arms backward in a large circular motion (Figure A). Begin slowly and then swing as quickly as possible several times. Reverse the swing (Figure B), remembering to start slowly and end fast.

Finally, swing one arm forward and the other arm backward at the same time (Figure C). Follow⁷ the same pattern of slow⁷ and quick swings before reversing the direction of each arm (Figure D), swinging each arm in the opposing direction to bring the exercise to a close. Throughout the whole exercise, the arms should be held completely relaxed with no muscle tension at all being used.



Juiibi-Undo I)

Remaining in *heikodachi* (natural stance), place the left hand on the side of the body with the fingers pointing up (Figure A). The fingers of the right hand cross over the front of the fingers of the left hand. Slowly push the left arm out straight while maintaining contact with the right hand; this push begins to stretch the fingers of the left hand backward. The point of the exercise is to increase the flexibility of the wrist and fingers, while at the same time allow, with the gripping hand, a chance to become accustomed to controlling another person when applying a wrist or finger lock, something that becomes apparent in the final three positions of this exercise.

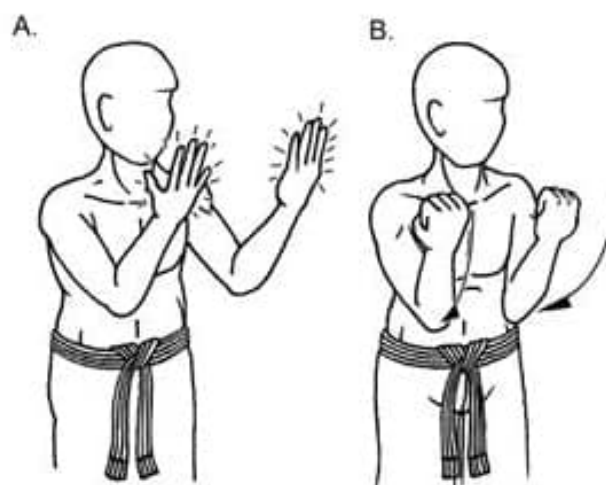
Return the left hand to the side of the body and rotate it so that the fingers now point downward (Figure B). From here, push the left arm back out again and insert the thumb of the right hand behind the left, placing it firmly in the center of the back of the hand. Apply forward pressure with the thumb on the outstretched hand

while pulling the fingers backward. As well as giving the fingers of one hand a good stretch, this position permits the opposite hand to mimic a basic controlling grip.

Release the grip on the fingers, but maintain contact by allowing the thumb of the right hand to keep in touch with the back of the left hand. Bend the left arm at the elbow and bring it up into a *chudan uke* (mid-level blocking position). At the same time swing the fingers of the right hand around the back of the left hand and grab the large thumb muscle {*abductor pollicis brevis*} with the fingers. Keeping the forearm vertical and the joints of the wrist and elbow one above the other (Figure C), apply pressure with the right hand to twist the left hand; pulling the left thumb backward toward the center of the body while the right thumb is pushing in the opposite direction does this.

In the fourth and final part of this exercise, release the grip with the fingers and roll the left hand inward so that the palm is facing down and the fingers are pointing toward the right-hand side of the body. This action should be completed while keeping the hands in contact with each other, first, through the right thumb and then through the palm of the right hand sliding over the top of the left hand. With both elbows pointing down, bring pressure to bear on the back of the left hand (Figure C). The knuckles of the left hand should sit in the center of the right palm. Once again this posture not only stretches the wrist joint, but also mimics the hand position applied when controlling an opponent and reinforces the *karatekas* introduction to the concept of *muehimi*. When the sequence is complete, repeat the same four parts of this exercise on the opposite side.

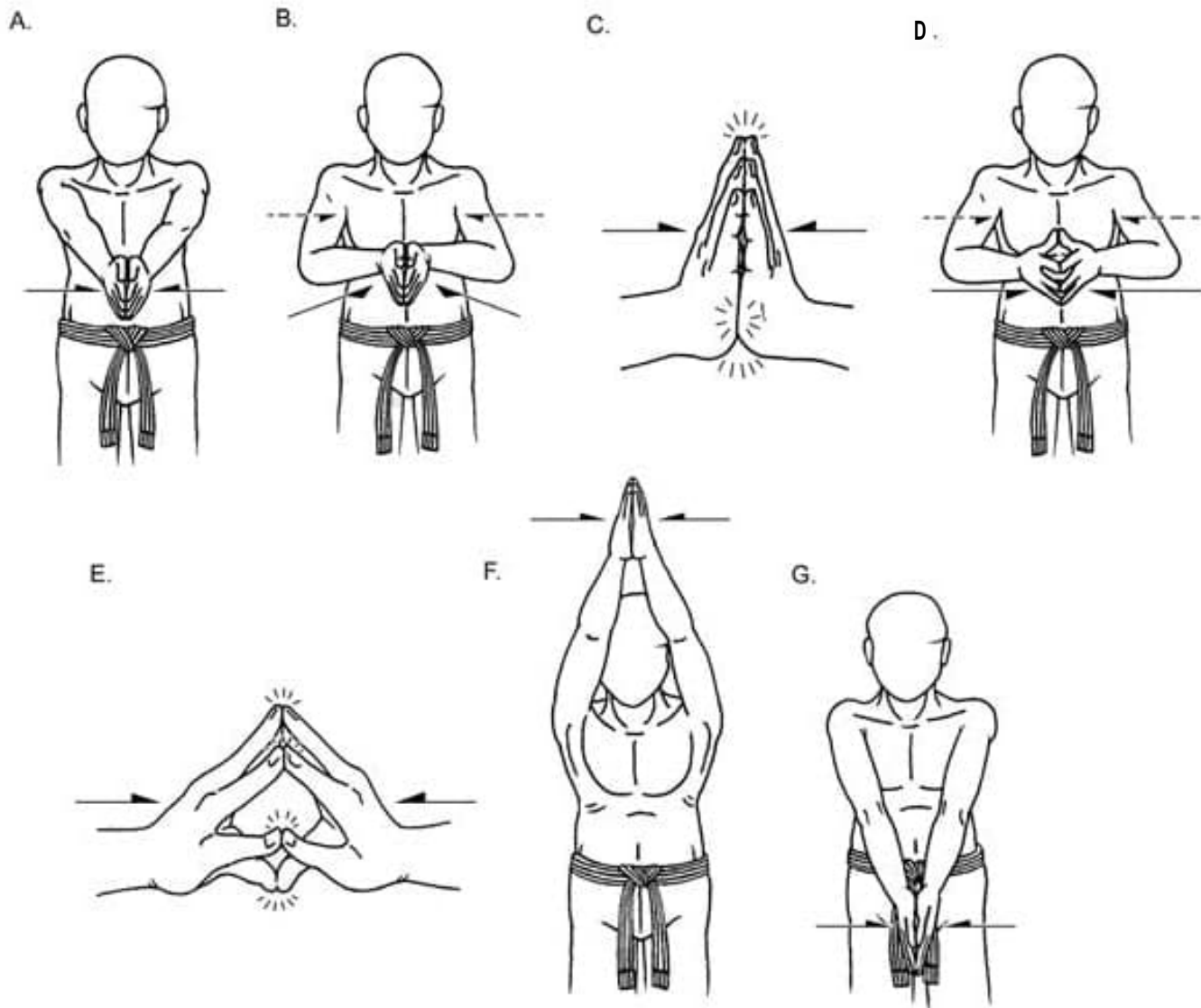
Muehimi is a word used in the Okinawan dialect {*hogen*) to describe the texture of rice when it has been pounded into a sticky, glutinous consistency. In *Goju ryu karate*, the word is used to portray a feeling of connection with either the ground, the parts of our own body as when the arms cross each other during blocking, for example, or when contact is made with another person. It is a similar feeling to magnetism, if I can borrow a scientific term. Once contact is made with the other person, you apply your body's weight to keep it there. Once *muehimi* is understood, it allows control of an opponent while alleviating the need to grab onto or hold him.



Junbi-Undo rt

Assume a *heiko dachi* (natural stance), making sure the feet are slightly wider than shoulder width **and** parallel; hold both arms in the *chudan uke* (mid-level block) posture. Without raising your center of gravity **or** the shoulders, stretch the arms out a little and open the hands **and** fingers as wide as possible (Figure A), taking in a deep breath through the nose while you do so. Keeping the energy in the fingers, exhale strongly through the open mouth and make a fist with both hands.

Take care to close down the armpit on both sides with the exhalation (Figure B). Keep in mind also that the toes should stretch forward and then grip the floor hard while the hands become fists. Squeeze the abdominal muscles to push the air out and focus on the body's center (*tanden*), exactly as in the *kata sanchin*. Relax back into the original posture and repeat the exercise three times. The relationship between this exercise and the fundamental *kata* of *Goju ryu* is clear, and by its inclusion in the *junbi undo* routine» new students are introduced immediately to the foundations of the *karate* they are about to start learning.



Junbi-Undo 15

Standing in *heiko dachi*, push the palms of the hands together hard and stretch the arms out in front of the chest (Figure A), inhaling while you do so.

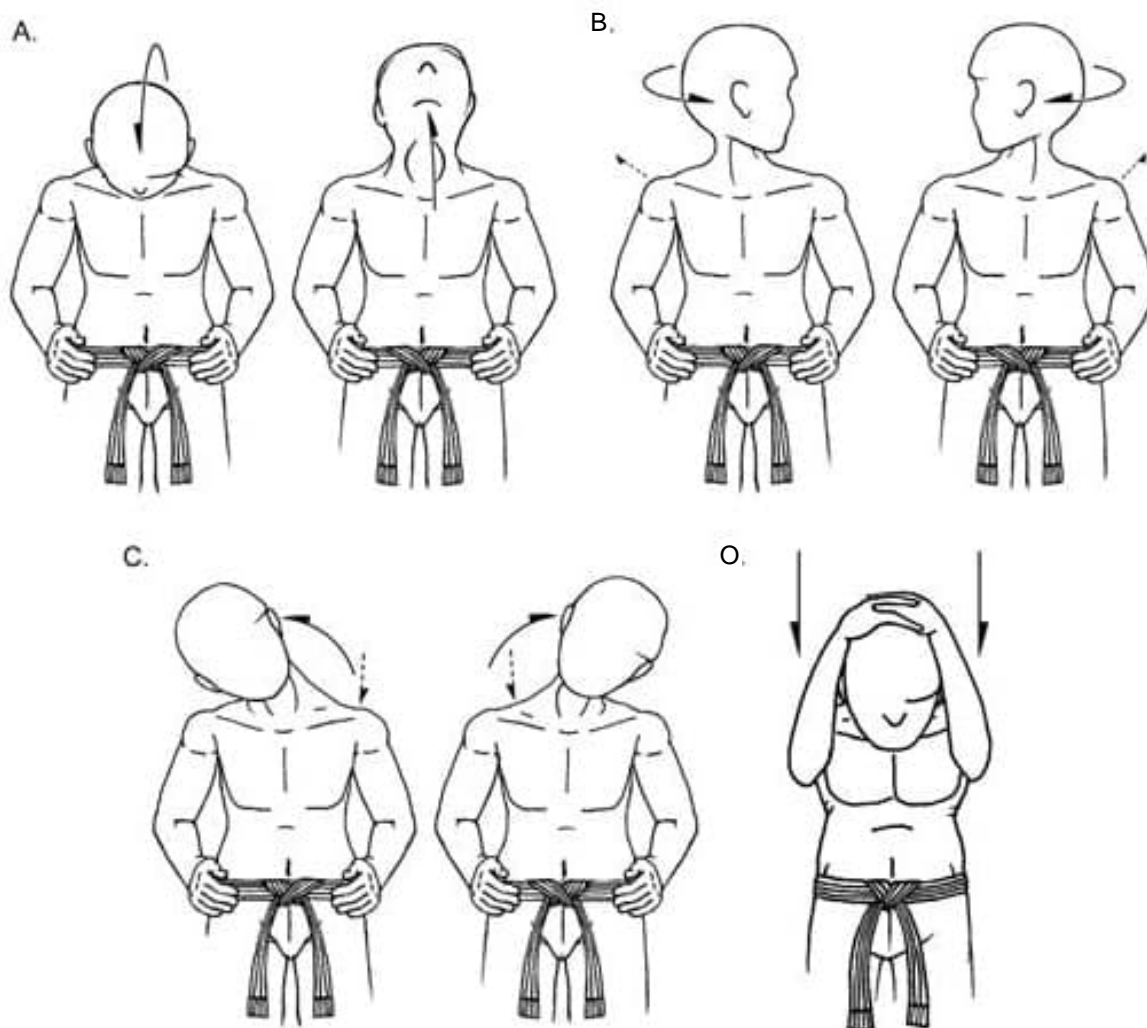
Continue to push the hands together hard while you draw them back toward the chest (Figure B) and exhale through the open mouth.

Making a line between both elbows, try to draw the wrists back a little beyond chat line to stretch the wrist joints (Figure C).

Breathe in one more time and while you exhale, focus the pressure on the fingertips (Figures D and E).

Illis exercise is repeated by stretching above the head (Figure F) and also toward the ground (Figure G). In each case, a strong exhalation accompanies the hands return to the body (Figure B), and care is taken not to raise the shoulders. Each time the hands return to the body, focus pressure on the wrist first and then on the fingertips, as seen in Figures C and E.

IJi the *Go/a ryu kata seipai*, near the beginning, a drop is made into *shiko dachi* (low stance) and from this posture the right elbow is used, either in a striking (*hiji uchi*) action or in a blocking action (*hiji uke*). Regardless of which action is taken, the block or the strike, the feeling in the arms during the kata is the same as in this exercise.



Junbi-Undo 16

Standing in *heiko dachi*, (Figure A), natural stance, with the hands resting on the hips, drop the chin to the chest and breathe in through the nose. Without holding the breath, move the head slowly backward as far as it will go, breathing out through the open mouth while you do so. As always, the physical movement and the breath should be synchronized to begin and end at the same time. Relax the shoulders and focus the mind on the harmony of the breath and posture while the head is gently moved from one position to the next and back again. Several repetitions should be completed.

From a natural position, breathe in through the nose and turn the head to the left, breathing out as you go and making sure the right shoulder is pushing backward to enhance the stretch (Figure B). From there, slowly turn the head to the right, inhaling and exhaling while you complete the move, and remember to now push the left shoulder backward. This exercise should also be repeated several times.

Holding the head naturally (Figure C), breathe in before dropping the head over to one side on an exhalation while pushing the opposite shoulder down toward the ground. Hold this for just a second before moving the head slowly over to the other side.

Keeping the body upright and standing in a natural posture, cup the hands over the back of the head (Figure D). Keep the elbows tucked in and the back up straight; allow the arms to become heavy, gently stretching the top of the spine. Hold this for ten seconds before slowly releasing the pressure from the arms and returning to a natural position.