



BODY CONDITIONING EXERCISES

Ude Tanren—Two-Person Conditioning Exercises

Within the various schools of *karate* in Okinawa, there are also a great many conditioning exercises that are done without tools, but with a training partner instead. To cover all of them and do justice to their value would require a book of its own and is something I am working on. For this reason, only a few *ude tanren* drills have been included here. However, once this kind of training becomes “normal,” the variety and combination of strikes and blocks a *karateka* can come up with indicates the progress he is making in the pursuit of realistic impact training for the body and mind. As well as the conditioning of the arms through regular practice, the purpose of *ude tanren* training is to cultivate the ability to deliver and receive “shock,” an important element of any *karate* technique, and the very thing that often brings many “thin-air” *karateka* (those who train without making contact with either each other or an appropriate training aid) to a standstill. Much like the drills used against the *ude kitae*, the *ude tanren* exercises encourage the body to condition itself while the mind (attitude) is toughened to withstand



A rare image of training at the *Uechi ryu* headquarters in Okinawa, c. 1970.



Kanei Uechi sensei (in the background) watches over others training, while in the foreground students practice *ude tanren*.

higher levels of discomfort brought on by the shock of collision. With the familiarity of contact comes a kind of reference point in the mind that allows an impact to cause less confusion, in turn, allowing us to continue on to a conclusion. When unfamiliar things happen, our mind automatically tries to work it out. *Ude tanren* familiarizes the mind with close contact and the effects of impact upon the body. In a real situation, it is unreasonable to expect to walk away from a physical altercation without being hit, and for



Students at the Shinseidokan *dojo* use *uchi-uke* to condition their arms.



Stepping forward into a block is often a new experience for *karate* students. Most step back when blocking.

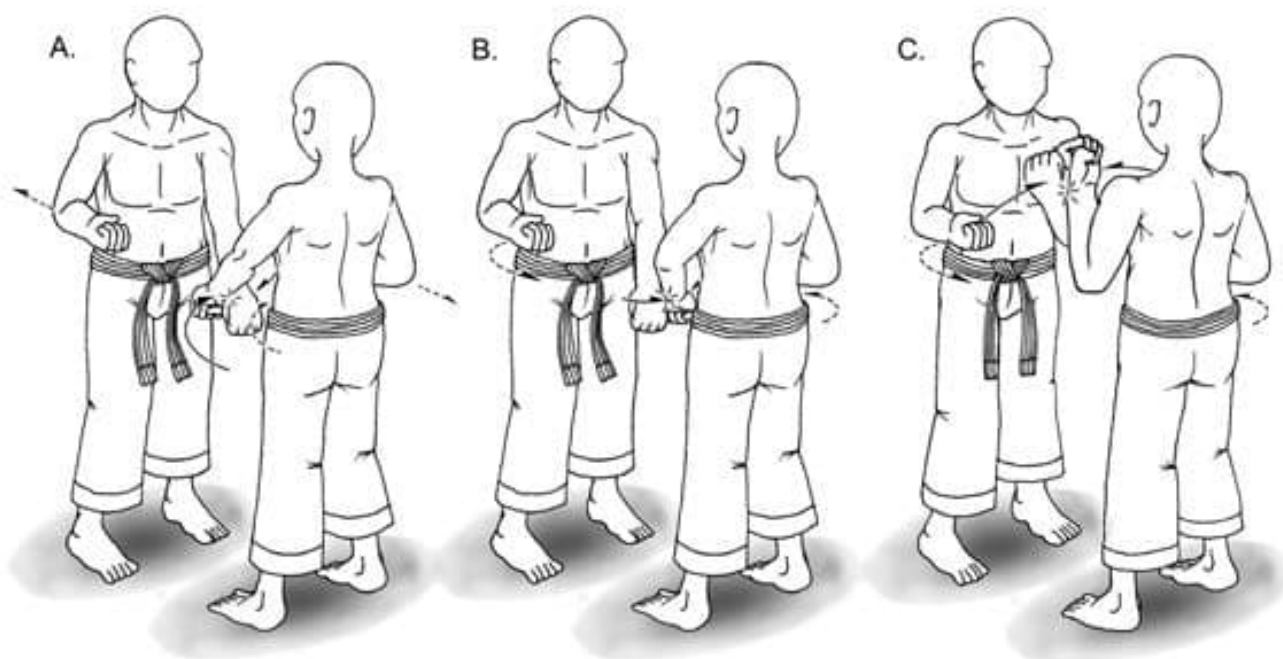


Becoming accustomed to impact on the legs.



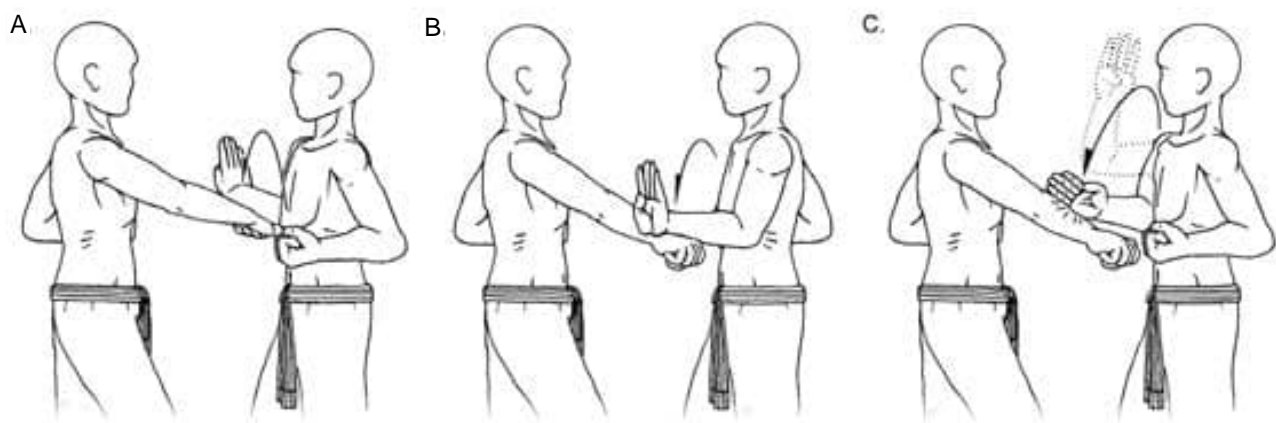
Stepping forward while blocking allows the mind to stay on the offensive.

this reason alone, it is essential that *karateka* work with a training partner (or with tools) on a regular basis, and certainly more often than they work in thin air. *Karate* is an art of self-defense, a martial art, an art that requires not only an ability to hit, but also an ability to withstand being hit. The weakest part of the body is quite often the mind, and *hojo undo* is a well-established method of developing and strengthening it.



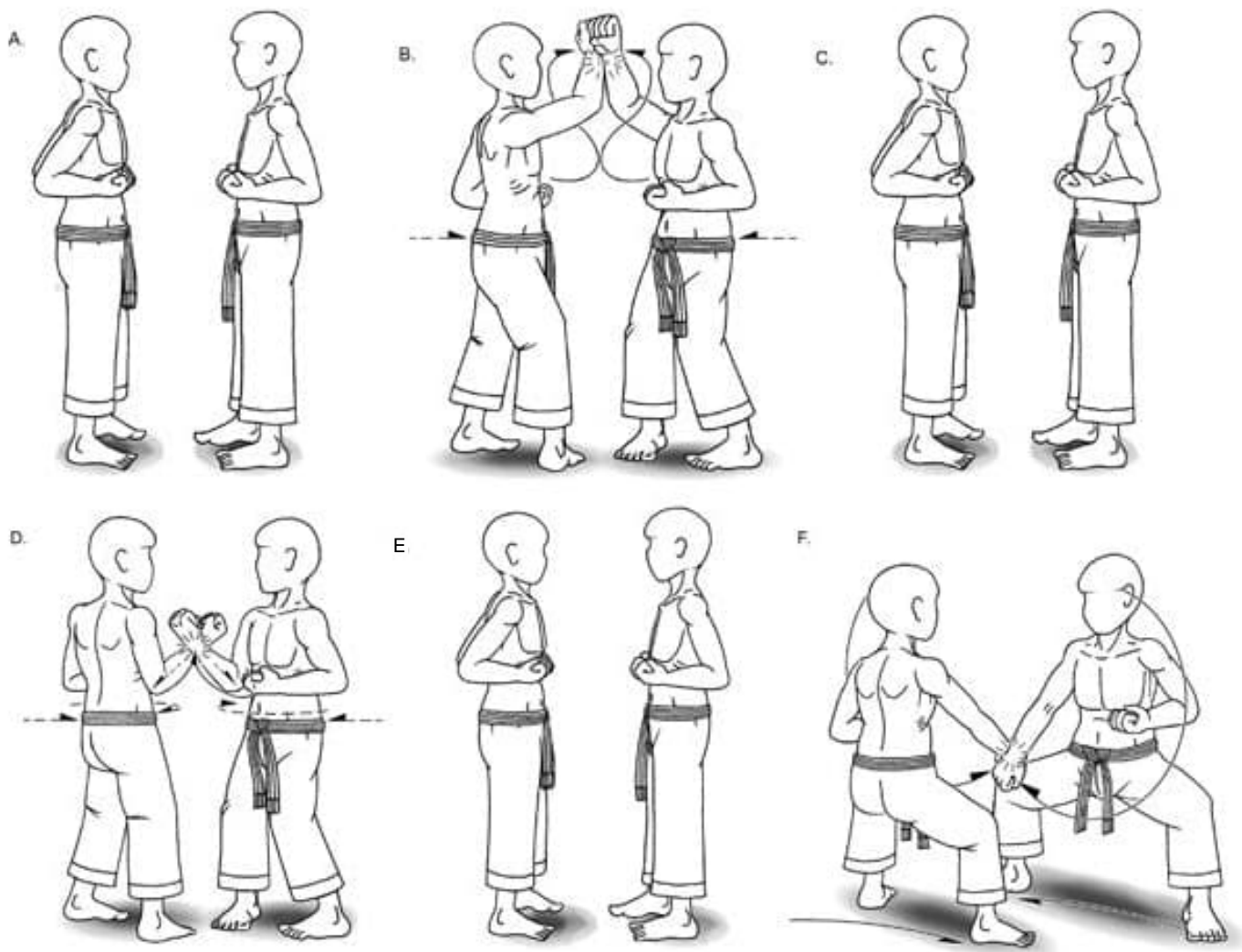
Exercise 1

Begin by facing your training partner and both swing your left arms together in a relaxed manner (Figure A). Impact should be on the inside edge of the arms and not on the soft underside where the veins and arteries are located close to the surface. The aim is to build up the level of acceptable impact, which means heavy contact at an early stage can be counterproductive. Remember to keep the shoulders relaxed and to move with a smooth swinging action. Build from the single impact exercise of an inside (of the arm) *gedan barai*, by continuing through and then swinging the same arm back to make an outside *gedan barai* (Figure B). The training can be built upon even more by combining an inside, and later, an outside *chudan uke* to the practice in a continuous flowing action (Figure C), alternating from arm to arm.



Exercise 2

Other methods of *udetanren* include stepping forward and backward with a partner while blocking and striking your partners arm. To achieve this, have one person step forward on the right leg and throw a *chudan ziiki* (mid-level punch) with the right hand. At the same time, the other person steps backward with the left leg and blocks with his right hand, using *chudan hikei uke* (mid-level open-hand block, Figure A). Then he repeats the block with the left hand (Figure B) before striking the punching arm with a right-handed *shuto uchi* (open-hand strike, Figure C). At that point the roles are reversed and the defender steps forward with a right-handed *chudan zuki* of his own, while the other person steps backward and repeats the same block and strike combination. This stepping forward and backward can be repeated until the required number has been completed or can be done continually for a set period of Eime.



Ippon Uke Barai - One-Step Blocking Practice

Facing your partner and standing in *heiko dachi* (natural stance) about one meter apart (Figure A), both step forward with the right leg into *sanchin dachi*. Immediately after the stance is made, both block with a right *jodan age uke* (high rising block) making impact at the wrist end of the forearm (Figure B). The block is then withdrawn while both step back into *heiko dachi* (Figure C). Repeating this exercise on the right-hand side in quick succession allows a sense of rhythm to be built into the practice and assists with learning how to manage the breath. Exhaling with the block and inhaling while you move back regulates the pace and intensity of the training and stops you from training with excessive speed. After blocking with *jodan* and stepping back, repeat the same exercise with *chudan uke* (mid-level block, Figure D), step back (Figure E) and then forward again with *gedan uke* (lower-level block, Figure F). With the *gedan uke*, step forward into *shiko dachi* (low stance).

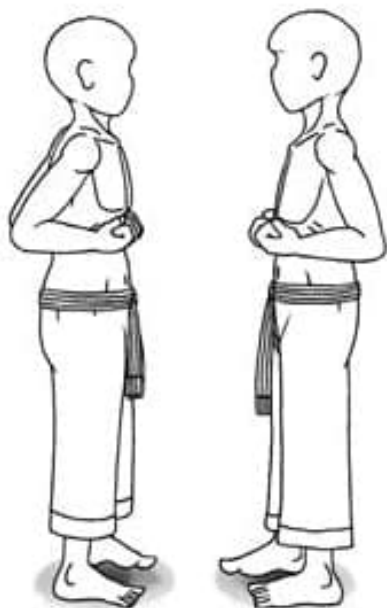
A second way to work this drill is to alternate on each count. Begin with a left step forward into *sanchin dachi*, \eftjodan uke\ step back. Then right step forward, right *chudan uke*, step back. Follow by a left step forward into *shiko dachi*, \etigedan barai, before stepping back for a third time. Once this can be done with control, expand the exercise further by continuing to change over and over until the desired number of repetitions has been completed or a set time has elapsed.

Sandan Uke Barai - Three-Step Blocking Practice

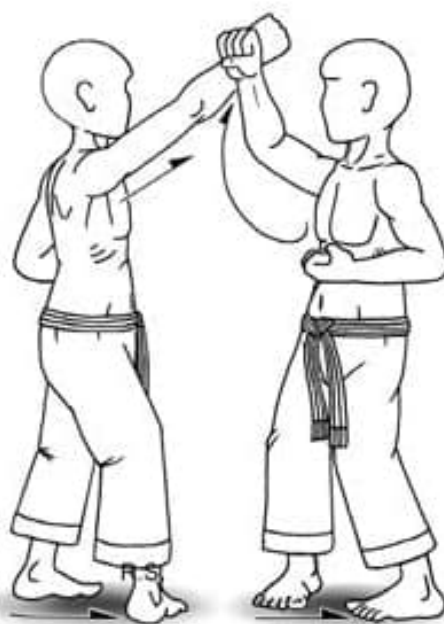
Also known by the name *san dan gi* (three-step technique), this practice introduces consecutive forward and backward stepping. Begin by standing about one meter apart from your training partner (Figure A). One person, steps forward with the right leg into *sanchin dacht* and punches *jodan zuki* (head high punch) with the right hand. The other person steps back into *sanchin dachi* with the left leg and blocks the punch with a right *jodan uke* (Figure B). The attack continues by stepping forward again into *sanchin dachi* and punching with the left hand, *chudan zuki* (mid-level punch), at which point the person blocking, having stepped back with his right leg to match the timing of his partner, again into *sanchin dachi*, blocks *chudan uke* (mid-level block) with his left arm (Figure C). With the third punch, step forward and drop into *shiko dachi*', then throw a right *gedan zuki* (low-level punch). The person blocking moves back, also into *shiko dachi*, and blocks the punch with a right *gedan barai* (low-level sweeping block, Figure D). From here the roles are reversed and the practice moves back in the opposite direction.

Some important points to remember are first, the primary purpose of this training is to condition the body to contact. If a block fails, a little impact from the punch should be felt and while great care should be taken when punching to the head, the body blows should carry' a little and eventually a fair amount of weight. Secondly, when blocking you should not try to evade the punches but instead blend with the other persons movement with good timing; try to sweep the other persons punch away. Therefore, the backward step should not be thought of as a retreat, but a way of maintaining an appropriate (counter-punching) distance. The people blocking should never move first or out of their own punching range. In the beginning, maintain a strict rhythm of step first, then technique. Later on, if both partners agree, it is possible to go faster and challenge each other at speeds closer to those found in real fighting. If done over the span of say ten or more minutes, *sandan uke barai* taxes the resources of even the fittest and strongest *karateka*.

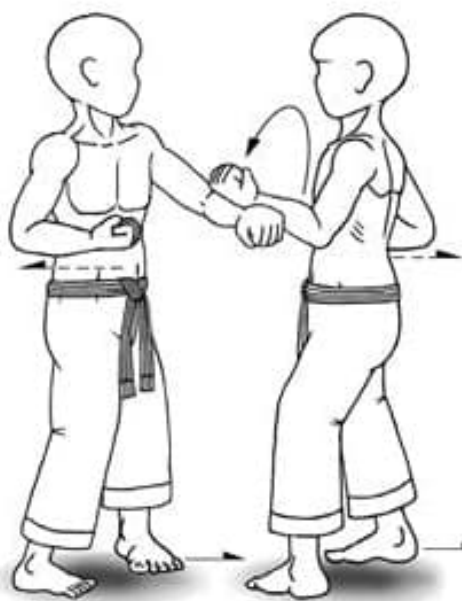
A.



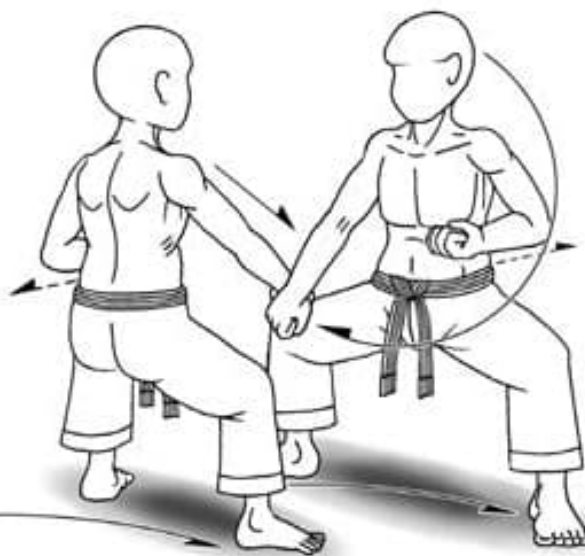
B.

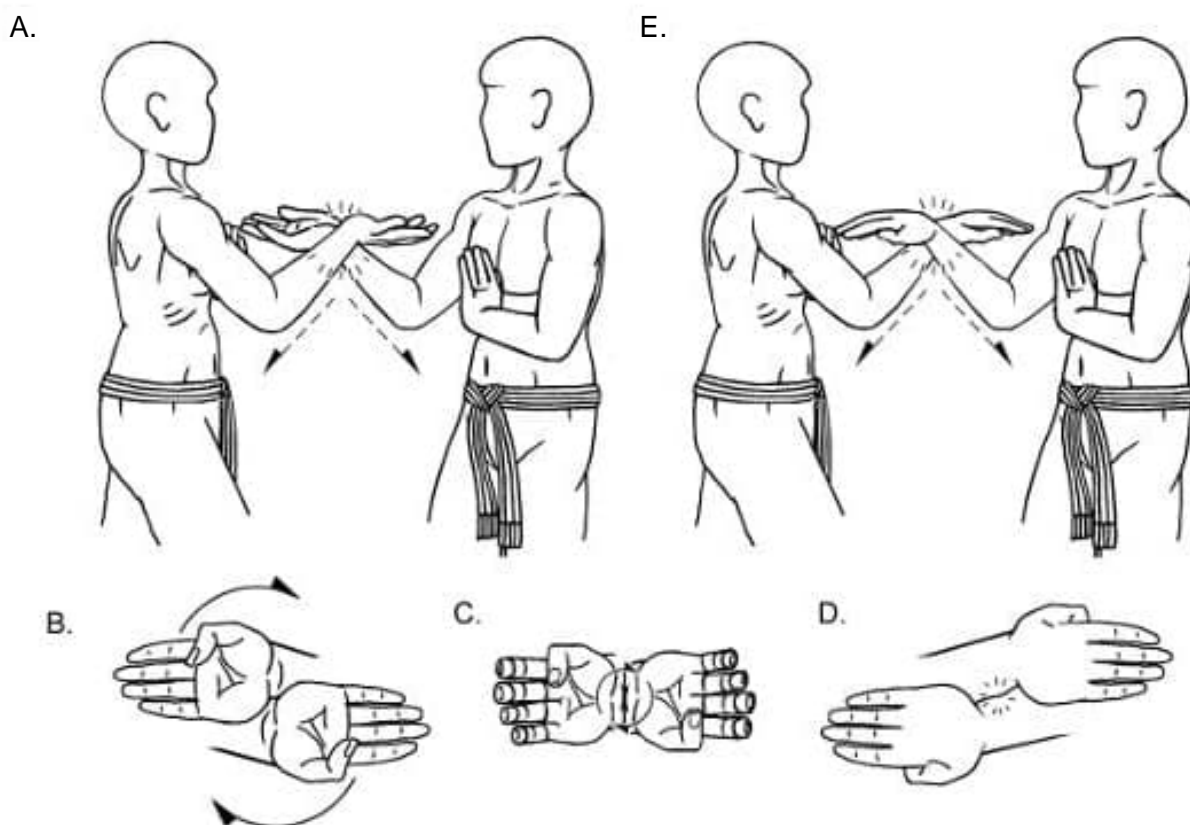


C.



D.





Wrist Rotation

This exercise is done to help gain an understanding of connection (*muchimi*) with the other person and to improve your own ability to anchor yourself to the ground by adopting a low center of gravity; It is a simple-looking exercise that if done properly improves your overall upper body strength and that all-important sense of connection with the ground and with your opponent.

Begin by facing a training partner. Both stand in *migi sanchin dachi* (right leg forward in *sanehin* stance) and place the right wrists together as shown (Figure A). From here, both begin to twist the hands back toward them (Figure B), keeping the palms facing upward until the fingers are pointing directly back toward the face (Figure C). At that point, while continuing to twist, the hands turn over so that the palms are now facing down (Figure D). Each then tries to close down his armpit and in so doing gives the other a slight pull (Figure E). The exercise is repeated in reverse, remembering to keep the wrists together at all times and to keep the hand rotating back toward you each time.