

Martial arts classes are becoming increasingly popular in all age groups due to the dangers of the world today. It's good to know you can protect yourself from an attacker.

Karate is practiced as a method of self-control, discipline, and self defense. When a new student enters the school, called a dojo, the student is given a white outfit called a Gui pronounced g-ee) and an Obie, a White belt. The color of the belt denotes the student's level of expertise, with white meaning "beginner". The new student sets out to pursue the long journey to black belt status. Kids from ages 4 to 100 are welcome in the dojo.

Although much of the karate equipment is provided by the dojo, there are some items you'll need to purchase. Let's first take a look at the karate equipment and clothing items you need to buy.

The Gui is usually purchased through the dojo.

Gloves are essential for karate training. They protect your hand from rope burns, skin abrasions, and sweat slips. Invest in a pair that is durable and made of breathable material. They're similar to bicycle riders or gymnast's gloves, with no fingers and an exposed knuckle area.

Mitts are used for kicks and punches, so it's important that they be durable, with thick dense padding of at least three inches.

As you progress in your training, you'll need "sticks", which are available in plain plastic, bamboo, PVC, or metal. Some come in sets of two of equal length and are used singly and together. The other type is a single stick, anywhere from four to eight feet long.

Plastic sticks don't last long, so if you plan to be using your karate equipment for a long time, invest in bamboo or metal sticks. Bamboo sticks will last for many years, if treated well. If they do start to break or peel, you can get a few more miles out of them by tightly wrapping the damaged area with duct tape. Gymnastics powder should be used to avoid sweat slips when using bamboo sticks (nanchucks).

Other karate equipment, provided by the dojo includes special floor mats which are thick and cushioned to protect the students in falls, rolls and other training procedures.

Kicking bags are used in routines and for kicking and punching exercises. They're suspended from the ceiling and weigh anywhere from 50 to 150 pounds. One

type is soft and spongy, best for younger children. The other type of bag is filled with sand, quite heavy and are only suitable for advanced students.

Punching bags are just smaller versions of kicking bags, about the size of a volley ball. They're used by boxers to train, as well.

Some dojos sell all of the karate equipment above. There are also karate equipment shops. When purchasing your equipment, quality and durability is most important. With a good instructor and equipment, your karate training will be an enjoyable journey to your black belt.