

Beginner Guide to Muay Thai:

Everything you need to know to get started

Muay Thai is a time-honoured martial art that has been honed over centuries. Known for its remarkable power, efficiency, and elegant simplicity, it features a seamless combination of kicks, punches, elbows, and knees, earning it the nickname the "Art of Eight Limbs."

Today, Muay Thai is among the most recognized and widely practiced martial arts globally. With a rich and esteemed history, it is increasingly acknowledged as one of the most effective striking styles available.

In this detailed beginner's guide, we will explore the origins of Muay Thai, its key components, and how to embark on your training journey. If you're seeking a starting point, you've found it.



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What is Muay Thai?

Muay Thai, often compared to kickboxing, stands out as a unique martial art with its distinct set of rules and scoring methods. This striking art incorporates punches, kicks, elbows, knees, and clinch techniques.

The term "Muay Thai" (pronounced Moo-aye Thai) translates to "Thai boxing" and is

recognized as Thailand's national sport—a true cultural passion for the Thai people.

With origins tracing back to Muay Boran, an ancient Thai martial art, Muay Thai has transformed over the past century into the dynamic sport we recognize today.

The roots of traditional martial arts in Thailand can be traced back to the 16th Century during the era of Siam, the former name of the country, where it emerged as a self-defence technique and a method of military combat.

Muay Boran serves as an umbrella term for various regional styles, such as Muay Korat, Muay Chaiya, Muay Lopburi, and Muay Thasao, each named after the specific regions from which they originated.

As regional conflicts subsided, this martial art evolved into a competitive sport. The sport gained significant traction between 1868 and 1910, during the reign of King Rama V, who organized royal competitions and awarded military ranks to the champions.

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The royal successors of the king took significant strides to systematise Muay Thai. They established the boxing ring, determined the official number of rounds, and required the use of Western-style protective gear, including gloves and groin protectors.

The global popularity of Muay Thai surged during the 1970s and 1980s, as numerous international matches showcased Thai fighters taking on practitioners from various martial arts disciplines, often emerging victorious.

In the years that followed, a wave of enthusiasts from around the world flocked to Thailand to train and compete. Today, Muay Thai is embraced globally, whether for competitive sport, self-defence, or fitness training.

make this different

Can everyone take up Muay Thai training?

A few short years ago, the mistaken perception was of Muay Thai fighters being wiry, mean guys covered in tats. However, this image of people itching for a competitive fight is misplaced.

The advent of MMA and the rise of the middle classes completely changed the landscape. People have discovered the benefits of training at a Muay Thai gym. So much so that they have sprung up worldwide in competition with conventional “pumping iron” type gyms.

I took up Muay Thai in my teens and met and became friends with plenty of others in the same age bracket. But that’s not to say the sport is just for youngsters. In fact, when I began coaching in 2012, most of my students were in their thirties. I have encountered five-year-olds, seniors in their seventies, men and women of just about every age and ethnicity.

So, Muay Thai is indisputably for everyone. No special aptitude is required. You will be fine if you can stand, see, jump, run, and move all your limbs freely.

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How dangerous is Muay Thai?

I get asked this one a lot. There's no denying that Muay Thai as a full-contact sport, is very violent. Fights are games of survival where black eyes, blood, and broken noses are the currency.

However, competitive fights take place in a controlled environment where referees enforce the rules and jump in to stop a fight if necessary. Indeed, there are risks to health involved with professional fights and to a smaller degree in amateur competitions. But rarely are injuries life-threatening.

Like me, most Muay Thai practitioners today got into the sport for purely fitness, health, and recreation reasons. That said, injuries do still occur when sparring or training. These are mainly down to over-exertion, mistiming a kick, or repetitive impacts.

Nothing too serious that won't mend itself in a few days. To distil the answer, though, yes, Muay Thai can be a dangerous sport. But what, in life, isn't to some degree or another?

The Advantages of Practicing Muay Thai

Enhanced Physical Fitness

One of the most noticeable benefits of engaging in Muay Thai is the significant improvement in overall fitness. Training in this rigorous martial art inevitably leads to higher fitness levels.

Not only will you notice an increase in your physical fitness, but your endurance and energy will also receive a noticeable boost. Expect to shed unwanted body fat swiftly and enhance your muscular stamina. Who knows? You might even achieve that coveted six-pack!

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Stress Relief

Muay Thai serves as an excellent outlet for stress relief. Whenever I'm feeling overwhelmed or a bit blue, the thought of hitting the mats for a Muay Thai session is always my go-to remedy.

The entire experience—from the supportive trainers to the camaraderie with fellow practitioners—creates an atmosphere where stress simply melts away. The sounds of powerful strikes and the rhythm of training uplift my spirits.

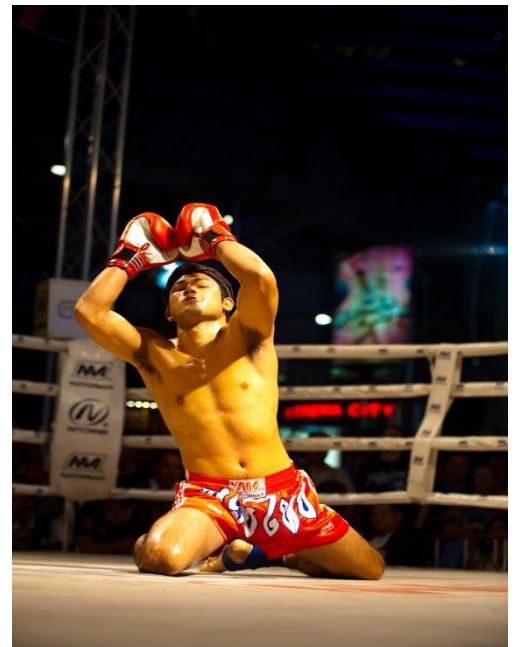
The ultimate joy comes from the exhilarating feeling of exhaustion after a rigorous workout. That rush of endorphins is hard to beat!

Pushing through a challenging session also contributes to better sleep quality, helping you recharge for the next day. Consequently, Muay Thai brings with it a substantial dose of positivity.

Enhanced Mental Resilience

Muay Thai inherently challenges both the body and mind. During training, the temptation to quit can be strong, but it's the mental fortitude required to persevere that truly matters. With a little encouragement from your coach, you can tap into your inner strength and push through to the finish.

This relentless pursuit of improvement translates into other areas of life, including increased productivity in my professional endeavours. Looking back, my only regret is not starting my Muay Thai journey earlier; I can only imagine the additional achievements I could have unlocked.



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Getting Ready for Training

Should you leap in enthusiastically or take a more cautious approach to prepare for your training?

I can't speak much to the latter, as I opted for the plunge without much thought. I didn't bother to build my fitness up beforehand; I simply walked into the gym and hoped for the best.

In the end, my fitness did improve over time. However, looking back, I realize that doing some preparation and getting fit first would have been wise. Thanks to my impulsive approach, I'm now well-equipped to share the essential preparations you should consider before embarking on your Muay Thai journey.

Is Home Training an Option?

Starting out by training alone is generally not the best idea. While it's not impossible, it can lead to developing bad habits and improper techniques without the guidance of a coach.

Having an instructor to correct your form during bag or pad work is vital. At my gym, all the Thai instructors are accomplished champions who have competed at the highest levels of Muay Thai. This gives me confidence that I'm learning authentic techniques from the best in the field.

Don't forget the social benefits of training in a gym environment. The camaraderie serves as a powerful motivator to push yourself harder, fosters a desire to train more, and allows you to learn from the experiences of others. Plus, gyms are equipped with all the necessary tools for effective training.

Once you've trained for at least a year, you might consider incorporating some home workouts into your routine. Just make sure you have a heavy bag, someone willing to help you with pad work, and the self-discipline to maintain a regular training schedule at home. However, I wouldn't recommend DIY training for beginners unless you're very far from a Muay Thai gym. In such cases, look for an online Muay Thai course to guide your practice.

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How can you get ready for your Muay Thai class?

Take it from my experience: don't just show up without preparation. Instead, focus on getting fit while you explore different gyms.

Muay Thai is a demanding workout, so doing some preliminary training will definitely help. However, keep in mind that the specific muscles used in Muay Thai aren't typically engaged in your everyday activities. Still, you can prime your body for some of the upcoming challenges.

If your primary form of exercise consists of clicking away on a computer, set aside at least a month to improve your fitness before entering a Muay Thai gym.

Engaging in activities like swimming and running will enhance your cardiovascular endurance. Your legs will be put to the test as well, so it's wise to strengthen those muscles and boost your anaerobic fitness through skipping and sprinting.

Alternatively, you can dive right in like I did, but be prepared to be completely exhausted after each session, especially during the first few weeks. Expect sore muscles, bruises, and legs that feel like jelly.

It took me about eight weeks to reach a decent level of fitness, but I was quite out of shape to begin with. Hopefully, with some prior training, you'll fare better. Looking back, I wish I had invested some time in improving my fitness beforehand.

If you manage to tough it out, the rush of endorphins after each lesson will be truly rewarding.

What should you wear to Muay Thai training?

There's no strict dress code, so wear whatever you'd normally wear to the gym. The atmosphere is quite casual.

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Personally, I prefer a lightweight top paired with Muay Thai shorts. If you're training in hot weather, you might even want to skip the shirt altogether. Muay Thai shorts are especially designed for the sport, offering comfort and allowing for the full range of motion you'll need.

While Muay Thai shorts aren't a strict requirement, they are the top choice for both comfort and honoring the sport's traditions. You can wear other types of athletic shorts, but ensure they allow enough flexibility for your kicks and are made from sturdy materials to withstand the rigors of training.

Tip: Opt for satin or a satin blend for your Muay Thai shorts. It's best to avoid nylon, as satin offers greater durability and won't become transparent when soaked with sweat.

Women often arrive at Muay Thai classes dressed in leggings or athletic shorts paired with a sports bra.

Ankle supports are frequently utilized by both seasoned fighters and newcomers for added stability and protection, though they're not mandatory. If you experience any foot or ankle discomfort after your initial session, consider incorporating them into your gear.

Training in Muay Thai is typically done barefoot on mats. However, some gyms—especially those in Thailand—include running as part of their endurance training regimen. It's a good idea to bring a pair of running shoes along if you'd like to participate in that aspect of the training.

What Muay Thai gloves should you consider?

When it comes to Muay Thai training, gloves are an essential piece of gear. I highly recommend investing in your own pair, as the gloves provided at many gyms can have a less-than-pleasant odor. It's not just about hygiene for me; gym gloves that have seen heavy use often have worn-out padding that may not adequately protect your hands.

Choosing the right Muay Thai gloves is pretty straightforward. You mainly need to consider three factors: the weight (or size) of the gloves, your budget, and the overall design.

The weight of boxing gloves is typically expressed in ounces. A versatile pair generally ranges from 8 to 18 ounces, with most options falling between 10 and 16 ounces. However, the

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primary focus should be on finding the right fit. For those competing in the heavyweight category, a glove weighing between 14 and 16 ounces might be more suitable. For more details, check out our [Guide to Muay Thai Glove Sizing](#).

When selecting gloves, it's essential to try them on and ensure they feel comfortable as you make a fist. New gloves may feel a bit tight initially, but they will break in after a few training sessions. If your fingertips are pressed too hard against the glove when you make a fist, it's likely too small.

Additionally, make sure the cuff fits securely around your wrists for proper support.

Aesthetics can also play a role in your decision. While looks aren't the main consideration for everyone, there are a variety of styles available to match your personal taste.

Brands like Hydra are gaining popularity among younger fighters thanks to their striking designs. On the other hand, traditional manufacturers such as Twins and Fairtex remain favorites globally for their classic styles and exceptional quality. If you're mindful of your budget and prefer a simpler look, Sandee offers comparable quality to the leading Thai brands at a more affordable price.

The Reality of Muay Thai Training

When it comes to Muay Thai, there's no easy way out. While the techniques might seem simple, the training itself is intense and draining.

What Can You Expect from Muay Thai Training?

It's likely far from what you envision from action films. Forget the exaggerated scenes of wild punches, kicking trees, or serene meditation by a waterfall—those are cinematic fantasies!

So, it's definitely not like the training montages featuring Jean-Claude Van Damme.

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Muay Thai training doesn't follow a strict curriculum or formal guidelines. Each gym's approach is influenced by the coaches' personal experiences and backgrounds. There's no definitive right or wrong way to do it.

In modern Muay Thai gyms, you'll find trainers with varying levels of expertise. In Thailand, the sport's birthplace, most training camps adhere to similar time-tested principles.

Typically, fighters engage in two training sessions each day. The first is usually scheduled around 8 AM, followed by a second at 3 PM. Each session generally spans two to three hours and includes the following components:

- A warm-up consisting of a 2-5 mile run
- Skipping for twenty to thirty minutes
- Shadowboxing or practicing techniques
- Pad work for four to six rounds, each lasting five minutes
- Bag work for five rounds of five minutes each
- Technical sparring or clinch work
- General conditioning exercises like sit-ups and pull-ups

However, this rigorous routine is designed for professional fighters. Most people don't have the time or energy to commit to such an intense schedule.

For beginners and intermediates, training sessions typically last between one and two hours. Each class kicks off with a run and some skipping to get your body warmed up. Following that, you'll engage in various training drills.

You'll learn how to throw punches and kicks, execute elbow and knee strikes, and utilize different blocking techniques. These skills will be practiced through shadowboxing, partnering drills, pad work, and bag training.

You can look forward to engaging in a variety of strengthening workouts as well. This will feature exercises like sit-ups, push-ups, squats, and other body conditioning routines.

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Essentially, it's a more accessible version of the training regimen designed for professional fighters.

While we all have different levels of athletic ability, Muay Thai training is designed to maximize whatever skills you have. The focus of Muay Thai is on conditioning the body and refining techniques. To improve, all you need to do is commit to your training and put in the effort consistently.



Technique Matters

I can't stress enough how vital proper technique is; it should be your foremost priority in Muay Thai. Mastering the right movements is undoubtedly the best way to protect yourself from self-inflicted injuries.

Forget about the idea of delivering powerful strikes right away; start off gently with light kicks and punches on a heavy bag. As you become more comfortable, you can increase both your speed and power.

Pain is often described as Nature's way of signaling you to stop. It serves as immediate feedback when you execute a kick incorrectly. However, pain stemming from poor technique can lead to lasting damage over time.

The key takeaway here is to be patient. Focus on making proper technique a habit. Speed and power will naturally develop as you refine your skills.

Stay Hydrated!

The human body is made up of approximately 50 to 65% water and requires adequate hydration for optimal functioning. The strenuous nature of Muay Thai can quickly deplete your body's fluid reserves.

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Dehydration can lead to unpleasant consequences, including headaches, feelings of nausea, reduced stamina, and even cognitive impairment. Health experts recommend consuming at least two liters (about four pints) of water daily to maintain good health. Always bring a water bottle to your training sessions and ensure you stay well-hydrated.

Nourish Your Body!

Your body needs fuel to generate energy. I've experienced days where I felt energetic and others where I was completely drained after just the warm-up.

The primary difference I found was whether I had sufficiently eaten before training. While various factors can contribute to fatigue, the most significant one was a lack of proper nutrition. That queasy feeling you sometimes encounter post-exercise often results from insufficient energy reserves.

What worked for me was consuming carbohydrates about two hours before training. Supplements like creatine can also be beneficial if taken around 30 minutes prior to your session. I also like to have a chocolate malt about an hour before training for an extra energy boost. Such drinks are quick and convenient sources of energy, especially useful for early morning workouts.

Consider Individual Lessons

You might find that private lessons can help solidify your techniques and ensure you're executing them correctly. This is particularly beneficial in the early stages of your training, especially if you're in a group setting. An instructor, no matter how dedicated, may not catch every mistake.

One-on-one training sessions can be incredibly valuable and ensure you're on the right track. While private lessons can be costly, even just a couple can lead to significant improvements in your technique and form.

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Seek Guidance

Don't hesitate to ask for assistance from your training partners. Many people feel hesitant to offer advice unless explicitly asked.

If you're experiencing pain while kicking or struggling with a specific technique, reaching out to your instructor or fellow gym-goers can provide valuable insights to enhance your performance.

Prioritize Rest

Don't underestimate the importance of rest. Insufficient recovery and overtraining can lead to more injuries, some of which could be quite serious. For instance, if you have a bruise on your shin, it's wise to avoid kicking to prevent further aggravation.

Instead, shift your focus to upper-body training and boxing to allow your lower body time to heal. Sufficient sleep is also essential for muscle recovery. Muscles grow during sleep, not during training sessions.

If you skimp on rest, you'll find it challenging to make progress. Pay attention to what your body is telling you—if it's urging you to skip a workout and relax with a show on Netflix, it's probably wise to listen.

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Summary

It's clear that there was a lot of information to process. To summarize: Muay Thai offers an excellent avenue for anyone interested in mastering a martial art, improving their fitness, building friendships, and engaging in a sport that emphasizes skill, discipline, and commitment.

With this insight, you should feel more equipped to embark on your Muay Thai training journey. If you have any questions or feedback, don't hesitate to reach out—I'm here to assist you!

