

Flexibility

by Karen Eden

When you look at this picture, keep in mind that at one time, this martial artist was diagnosed with juvenile arthritis and was told he would never walk right again. He had to live with constant pain in his legs from age 9 to 11, and was told the disease would hinder his growth and flexibility. He also sustained a sports injury in Little League that left one leg shorter than the other.

Zak Szabo, a Black Belt in Tang Soo Do, (karate) is an instructor at C.S. Kim Karate in Pittsburgh, PA and has made Martial Arts his livelihood, as well as a major part of his life despite the physical limitations physicians once placed upon him. He was able to reach his goals through the discipline of karate as well as his parents' support and his own determination.

Here are some of his suggestions, which he claims with a lot of determination and persistence, anyone, regardless of their physical restrictions, can obtain:



1. Never force a stretch. Go as far as you can comfortably go and hold it.
2. Once you've reached your holding point, time it. Start with five minutes the first day and gradually work your way up to twenty minutes.
3. Stretching before and after a workout can increase flexibility tremendously, as well as prevent injury. Start your stretches relaxed and with ease before class, push a little harder after class while your muscles are still loose.
4. **DON'T BOUNCE.** Keep all stretches static.
5. Finally, be patient with yourself, flexibility takes time. Noticeable changes will come within a couple of months if you are diligent.

While not everyone will be able to do a full split or be able to kick straight over their heads, people must realize their limitations as well as their strengths, and continue to try to reach their goals.

