

feel fearless



Oxygen shows you how to control your panic alarm. Plus we've got six simple moves to stay safe. BY JENNIFER LAWLER | PHOTOGRAPHY ALEX ARDENTI

When I began training in martial arts nearly 15 years ago, my greatest challenge – and biggest reward – was learning to live without fear. I remember how exhilarating it was the first time I stood up for myself. I felt like I could take on anyone. And to me, that's what self-defense is – standing up for yourself. It's knowing about risks and understanding strategies –

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being smart and creative when responding to verbal or physical threats.

Many women believe learning self-defense makes them braver. Vickie Anderson, a second-degree black belt in tae kwon do, says it was early in her training she understood her own power. While practicing, Anderson made a fairly simple punch and realized she could have seriously hurt her sparring partner, a male black belt, if it weren't for her self-control. “It hit me that I could defend myself, even against a very skilled man,” she says. “That confidence made a big difference in my everyday life.”

trust your instincts

Fear can be a gift; it alerts us to danger. “Think of it like a burglary alarm,” says psychotherapist Sandra L. Brown. Learning to trust your gut instincts is a crucial part of protecting yourself. Next time you feel uncomfortable, take control of the situation. If you're afraid to walk to your car after work, ask a friend or a security guard to accompany you. But fear can also be a burden, says Laura Kamienski, creator of the program Empower! Self-Defense for Women, and director of Kicks Martial Arts for Women. “Through self-defense, you find a balance between feelings of paranoia and overconfidence,” she adds.

are you in danger?

Your greatest risk is not a random attack. You're far more likely to be hurt by someone you know than by someone you don't. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that as many as 70 percent of assaults against women are perpetrated by acquaintances, friends or boyfriends. So be careful about your relationships, casual and otherwise.

do you know him?

“Dangerous men come in all shapes and forms,” writes Brown in her book *How to Spot a Dangerous Man Before You Get Involved* (Hunter House, 2005).

"They slip into our lives by appearing, at least initially, incredibly normal." Most attackers, even if they don't know you, try to gain your trust and then manipulate you into a powerless situation. Py Bateman, author of numerous self-defense books and a self-defense instructor for women since the '70s, created the three-stage theory of how rapists attack – intrusion, desensitization and isolation:

STAGE 1: He crosses your boundaries, like sitting too close or touching you inappropriately.

STAGE 2: He increases his coercive behavior and tells you that you're overreacting.

STAGE 3: He gets you alone, and it can be as innocuous as "Let's go someplace where we can talk." This is where he isolates you from getting help.

The "How can I recognize a rapist?" booklet from Virginians Aligned Against Sexual Assault outlines the red flags of a potential abuser:

- He doesn't listen to you.
- He's inappropriate when talking about, looking at or touching your body.
- He stands in your way to stop you from leaving.
- He tries to get you drunk or gives you drugs.
- He seems to enjoy when you're not comfortable.
- He acts as though your relationship is more intimate than it is.
- He's disrespectful.
- He makes degrading comments or jokes.
- He focuses on women as objects, not as people.

There are a lot of roadblocks that stop us from responding to red flags, says Kamienski: "We're taught 'be polite,' 'don't make a scene,' and [that] we're weak [and] we're not capable of defending ourselves." To overcome these barriers, "Practice role-playing with others," she says. "All of these techniques help you respond to red flags."



push hands technique

If someone is physically threatening show him he can't get in your space. Place your hands the attacker's chest and shove him away. If he has grabbed use your free hand to push his arm away.



palm strike

Use this technique to target your attacker's chin through your hand. Open your hand. Keep your fingers together, bending slightly. Pull your hand close to your body with your fingertips pointing down. As you go to hit your target, bend your wrist so you strike him with the heel of your hand. You'll have more power with the heel of your hand than with an open-handed slap.



keep a distance

Attackers try to "train" you to accept unacceptable behavior. That's why you need to set your boundaries and reinforce them. According to Pia Melody, a writer for healthyplace.com, we have two types of boundary systems, internal and external. "Our internal boundary protects our thinking, feelings and behavior and keeps them functional," she says. "Our external boundary allows us to choose our distance from other people and enables us to give or refuse permission for them to touch us."

If a man touches you in an inappropriate way, to create an external boundary say, "Don't touch me like that." He may say you're overreacting. To create an internal boundary, tell yourself you're not blowing it out of proportion. Once you set your boundary, reinforce it by repeating it and walk away, and get help, if needed.

make him listen

The word *no* is a powerful tool to set your boundaries. It alerts the victimizer that you're on to him and you won't allow him to abuse you.

"Saying no really works," says Debz Butler, a former martial arts student who teaches yoga. One night, when she was alone, an "obviously drunk and disturbed man" started harassing her. "I just took a deep breath, put my hands up in a defense position and said, 'No! Leave me alone!' He was so surprised, he just left."

physical self-defense

Sometimes a physical threat requires a physical reaction for you to protect yourself. You can follow these six simple moves, even if you're nervous. Practice them and you'll feel more confident. You can take care of yourself.

rear elbow strike

If someone grabs you from behind, use the rear elbow strike to the solar plexus (between the breastbone and the belly button).

This causes pain, loss of breath and disorientation, giving you a chance to get away. Bend your elbow so your forearm is parallel to the floor. Make your hand into a fist. Shove your elbow back into the attacker's solar plexus.



knee strike

When you're facing your attacker, you can use this technique to get loose from a grab or to disable the attacker. Target the attacker's groin or solar plexus. Grab the attacker's shoulders, upper arms or head and pull his body into the strike as you drive your knee up and into the target.

front kick to the groin or ribs

The groin is a sensitive area on your attacker. If he's protecting himself, aim for the ribs.

Raise your leg, bending at the knee and thigh, parallel to the floor. Thrust your foot forward, targeting his groin or ribs and striking him with the ball of your foot. Pull back quickly so he can't grab you.



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ankle throw

Use this move if your attacker is facing you. Grab the attacker's wrist that is closest to your hand. Grab his shoulder with your other hand. Hook your foot behind his foot. Push the attacker over your foot by shoving against his shoulder. Just as he loses his balance, let go. 📌

