



## **MIND OVER MATTER** – Hand-to-Hand Defensive Techniques For Senior Citizens

By Phil Humphries Concealed Carry Magazine April Issue 2022

It is highly unlikely that you, as a mature citizen, will be accosted by someone in your own age demographic. It's not impossible, but it's unlikely. Given that probability, you will most likely be facing a younger, stronger, faster assailant. You will need to level the playing field as much as you can. You won't be following any rules. The objective is to survive and escape the encounter. A relatively recent news story that made the rounds on social media covered an elderly woman who was attacked by a much younger man. Out of the blue, the male suspect punched the victim. The lady picked up a board and beat her assailant, saving herself and sending the dirtbag to the hospital in an ambulance. This is the sort of determined resistance that will be required if a senior is to get through a surprise physical assault. The lady referenced in the above incident had the presence of mind to pick up something from her immediate environment to use as a weapon. She took advantage of what was available to her — which was exactly the right thing to do

— and leveled the playing field. However, there might not be an immediately accessible improvised weapon available to you in a similar situation. If you are not armed and have no option to arm yourself, you will have to rely on your natural weapons — your hands, elbows, knees and feet. That means a hand-to-hand engagement, which isn't something most seniors want to contemplate. The good news is that there are a few simple techniques that will afford you a rudimentary empty-hand arsenal. Bear in mind that they will be nearly useless if you don't practice them. With that being said, I offer the following as a "starter kit."

### THE TIGER CLAW AND OTHER STRIKES

The following techniques use similar delivery mechanisms. This keeps everything simple, as practicing one reinforces the others; it is the same muscle memory and neural pathways that repetitions will develop. Start by making a "C" shape with your hand. The "C" is the area between your thumb and the rest of your fingers. You want the striking surface to be the bony portion near the base of your first finger rather than the soft web portion. However, if you strike the throat with the "C" portion of your hand, that is good enough. Extend that "C"-shaped hand (called a "tiger claw" in some martial arts systems) just as you would extend a straight punch. You want to shoot that "C" directly to your assailant's tracheal area, which is the front-facing portion of the throat under the face and above the collar. Do that as fast and with as much energy as you can muster. You want to, at the very least, cause a gag effect, though this technique can also damage the trachea and impede breathing. However, if you are attacked and fear for your life, it's time to forget about your attacker's welfare. Slam that tiger claw into his or her throat with force. Your attacker wants to hurt you, so you must hurt him or her in order to avoid injury or worse. Utilizing the same straight-out punching extension of your arm, you can also use the palm-heel portion of your hand as a striking surface. You can curl your fingers in if you want, but it's most important to have your thumb in against the hand so that it isn't as prone to being caught on your assailant and hyperextended. The bottom portion of your palm heel is the portion of your hand that you want to impact your assailant. You can aim for the chin or the nose; either will work. The nose is always a great target, as it is easy to break, and whether it breaks or not, smacking it will also be disruptive to your attacker's train of thought. This is I ■ Whenever you decide to start a physical training

regimen, it is important to consult your doctor to be certain that you are healthy enough to do so. But even once you get the go ahead, there are a few important things to bear in mind. TAKE IT EASY In my experience, the most common training injuries when you're not using a striking dummy or punching bag are hyperextensions. It can be easy to throw that punch or kick a little too hard or far, which can place undue strain on knees and elbows. When none of your shots are terminating into something that will absorb their force, this is concern No. 1. WATCH YOUR STEP Right behind hyperextensions are falls, especially when we're talking about kicking drills. Don't be afraid to train, but remember how much your legs weigh — and that they can easily pull the rest of you in whatever direction you're kicking. Throwing your legs around changes your center of gravity, which is the very definition of a fall if you don't remain in control. As with everything else in self-defense, start slow and build technique first. Speed will come later. ONLY HIT WHAT YOU MEAN TO I once saw a young man take himself out of a taekwondo tournament before it even started by breaking his foot on the edge of a piece of hotel furniture. He wasn't even kicking particularly hard — just limbering up, getting ready for a night-before workout. But he stopped paying close attention to what he was doing for a second, and that was all it took. If you intend to train in these techniques, it is imperative that you do so in an open area and that you never, ever get ahead of yourself. Just as you could never intentionally stub your toe on something as hard as you unintentionally can, even what feels like a "light" training punch that connects with a door frame can end with an annoying (and embarrassing) trip to the hospital. — Ed Combs, Senior Editor TRAIN SAFE APRIL 2022 RESPONSIBLY ARMED AMERICANS USCCA.com 107 a "palm-heel" or "palm" strike and is common to a range of martial disciplines. While using the same punching extension of your arm, this time extend your four fingers, thumb tucked alongside, to form a spear shape. This finger-jab (spear-hand) strike will target your assailant's eyes. Your fingers should be slightly bent — particularly the index finger — so that all of the fingertips are roughly aligned. That is to lessen the chances of damaging your fingers if you miss the eyes and hit a harder area of your attacker's face or head. Most folks are a bit squeamish about jamming their fingers into another person's eyes. But if you are being attacked and are trying to avoid injury, rape or death, attacking the eyes is one of

the best defensive techniques you can employ. The sheer pain of an eye-jab notwithstanding, if your attacker can't see, that is a huge advantage for you. The three hand strikes I just described can also be used in combination. An example would be a spear-hand thrust to the eyes, a tiger-claw ("C"-clamp) strike to the throat and a palm heel to the nose, all delivered in rapid succession. **PUT THOSE LEGS TO WORK** Now let's talk about your legs and what wonderful defensive weapons they can be. Let's start with the knees. Knees are awesome impact weapons, and a knee to the groin immediately following a spear hand to the eyes may potentially allow you to escape. There are different angles from which a knee strike may be employed and different targets upon which to focus. Here, we will address just one: a rapidly raised knee between your attacker's legs into the genital area. If you are close enough to do that, it is one of the best defensive techniques out there. It doesn't matter whether your knee or the portion of your upper leg just above the knee is what strikes the genitals; the desired effect will usually occur if the leg is raised briskly into the groin area. Next we'll address the front kick — which, like the knee strike, is also aimed at the groin. If your aggressor is just out of knee range but within reach of your extended leg, a simple front kick to the genital area is a time-honored goto technique. This kick will utilize the top of your shoe and your lower leg (shin) as its striking surface. You will raise that shin and foot directly into your assailant's groin area with as much force as you can muster. Don't worry about being Jackie-Chan-fast — just get it there. Don't concern yourself with whether it is the top of your foot or your shin that makes contact either. Just get that leg up between your attacker's legs with as much speed as you can. Don't "pull" your kick but rather kick as though you plan to cleave your aggressor in half. Use whichever leg is easiest for you. That might be the one closest to your assailant, which will be the fastest because it has the shortest distance to travel. But if you need to use one leg over the other due to balance purposes, do so. Just get the kick into the groin as fast as you can with as much upward force as you can. That is the objective. Not form. Only speed and efficiency are important. **FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF** If you diligently practice the techniques described here to the point where you can deploy them at will with accuracy and power, you will have built yourself a solid foundation for empty-hand self-defense. It isn't the same as attending weekly in-person training at a

martial arts school, but it is an excellent start and decidedly better than nothing. If you have access to a training partner, be careful not to incapacitate each other. Use common-sense safety precautions when practicing. A groin protector is a nice piece of equipment to have when practicing groin attacks, and safety goggles or glasses should be worn when practicing eye attacks. If you have access to a health club or gym where there are heavy bags, be cautious and get a feel for the solidity of the bag before hauling off and whacking it. If you aren't accustomed to hitting bags, you could potentially injure yourself. And it doesn't help you if you get injured in practice. Bear in mind that it isn't good enough to just throw a couple of the techniques into the air and call it a day. It isn't good enough to just visualize the strikes either. You have to actually practice them at least a couple of times each week. Otherwise, when the chips are down, they won't serve you well.