



The Most Important Kick in Martial Arts; The Front Kick

By Raymond C. Nelson, P.E.
Sam Bo Nim, Downtown Dojang & Rice Karate Club

Any human being with knowledge of how to use their legs knows how to do a front kick. It is instinctive, a natural part of the human condition. The first time a baby, when walking, accidentally hits something with its foot and doesn't hurt itself, it has learned how to kick. Kicking is not always a violent act. There are many instances, a farmer clearing soil, a careful driver checking her tires for proper inflation, a person with their hands full opening a door, where kicking is used for other, non-confrontational purposes.

However, whether done for self-defense or for other more esoteric reasons, it is important to be helped to understand correct kicking technique in order to avoid injury to oneself as well as improve effectiveness and efficiency. Correct technique is important for any martial arts technique, but it is especially so for kicking because injuries resulting from kicking can be insidious. There are many people who have quit or do not train on a regular basis due to sore knees, bad ankles, and/ or sprained toes.

Grandmaster Kim Soo has mentioned many times an experience when he first visited the United States in the early 1960's. During this time when he served as the Korean correspondent to 'Black Belt Magazine,' he was invited several times to the United States to conduct seminars on martial arts. Often-times he noticed that some students would be watching and not participating. Surprisingly, in most cases these were the most senior students.

Naturally enough, Grandmaster Kim Soo, pondered on the reason, and had to consider unawareness and arrogance. Fortunately, at one school, a student who was not participating, approached Grandmaster Kim Soo, bowing very respectfully. He apologized for not being able to participate due to a chronic knee injury. Grandmaster Kim Soo thanked him and then later reflected that the schools that had senior students not participating all tended to execute front kicks the same way.

At the next school he visited Grandmaster Kim Soo noticed the same phenomenon. He also observed that students at this school all performed the front kick without pivoting their supporting foot and even occasionally lifted their heels (especially when kicking high!). This confirmed for him the importance of the correct kicking method. What became apparent was that kicking without pivoting, when done repeatedly (in some cases for years), puts stress on the inside of the knee joint and leads to sore knees and even ligament or cartilage damage if continued.

Pivoting not only prevents injury but increases the effective range of the technique. Try this experiment;

1. Lift one foot off of the ground and put it comfortably down in front of you.
2. Next, pick a spot about 12 inches in front of that spot and put the same foot there. Notice how your supporting foot naturally pivots when you put the other foot on the new spot!

Kicking and punching, if done correctly, are as natural as walking and running. In fact, the back and forth swinging movement of the arms is identical for walking, running, and punching. Imagine the drum major of a marching band, notice how they raise their knees high while simultaneously swinging the arms, with the opposite side arm coming forward. This is exactly how the front and knee kicks are performed. Including the arm motion with the foot movement is important for balance. Balanced movement, a basic principle, is essential for speed, power, and control - essential elements of an effective technique.

In summary, techniques performed in harmony with how the human body is designed to move are not only more efficient, they are easier to teach and more importantly are healthier not only from an injury perspective but also from a health improvement one.