



* Readers should be aware of & adhere to the law as it relates to the use of reasonable force.



6 Palm heel jab to jaw



7 Palm Heel Thrust to jaw

SELF PROTECTION

ALWAYS TO HAND WHEN NEEDED!

Which is the best 'body weapon' for self-defence? I am asked this question numerous times every week whilst teaching classes and courses. The question itself begs another question in that 'what is meant by the best'? Do we mean the most effective, most powerful, easiest to execute? Or all the above? This is not an easy question to answer as it is subjective, by that I mean a Boxer would have a different answer to a Karateka and Judoka may have a different view entirely. If you are a kicker then you may well prefer a particular kick over any hand strike.

ANY strike or kick can be effective if you have trained it sufficiently and have the skill and timing to land it on the correct target at the

right time; indeed, any strike or kick that lands and has the desired effect could be said to be the 'best' at that moment in time in that situation against that opponent.

Having said all of that, I want to look at one body weapon that is utilised in almost every self-defence class or course and that is the palm strike. Striking with the palm is widely utilised in many martial arts in one form or another and for good reason, primarily it is a very safe (for the user) method of striking. The recognised father of modern combatives - Captain W. E. Fairbairn, legendary teacher of Commando forces in WW2 utilised this technique and referred to it as the 'chin jab'. It was utilised at very close quarters. Fairbairn advocated never drawing the striking hand back, thus no telegraphing the

blow, he also states for the defender 'have your fingers spread, so as to reach your opponent's eyes', and that the strike should never have to travel more than six to eight inches (dependent on the relative size of each combatant). Fairbairn also stated that the primary target for this technique should be the point of the jaw or chin, hence the name of the technique.

The heel of the palm is a very hard surface and withstands impact much better than other areas of the hand such as the knuckles which tend to break if the strike is not delivered correctly or it is mistimed and connects with the wrong target. The palm heel may bruise but that's likely to be the most damage you will suffer if you mistime the strike. Another slight risk is that of spraining the

wrist if the hand is in the wrong position, however, since it is almost a natural strike formation, this rarely occurs.

The palm heel retains sufficient density to transfer kinetic energy efficiently making it a very effective striking tool. Even a 'soft' strike with the palm heel can feel much harder. The palm heel strike can also be launched from very short distances and may even be used as a push to force the head back, for example. It is very easy to learn and even a beginner can utilise this technique with good effect.

The palm heel strike is only effective when delivered in a straight-line trajectory, this may limit its opportunities for deployment but does, on the other hand, make it a very fast strike. The palm heel strike may be launched off either the lead or trailing hand, generally, when launched off the lead hand it is delivered in a very short, sharp motion, similar to that of a jab in western boxing and its power comes from the speed of delivery. The same blow delivered using the trailing hand utilising good body mechanics, hip rotation and putting body weight behind the hit, although a little slower than the lead hand version, can deliver tremendous power. The palm heel strike is also a good way to teach linear striking methods prior to moving onto

the technically more difficult 'reverse punch', for example. Making it an ideal strike to teach to beginners.

The palm heel strike is also easily adapted 'on the fly' and may be turned into a 'claw' type of attack by simply curling the fingers slightly, very effective to the eyes/face (see earlier reference to the 'chin jab').

The primary target for the palm heel strike should be the point of the jaw as already stated, other targets are also good: the nose, cheek bones, frontal bone (forehead) if the head is turned then the temple or jaw hinge are also viable targets. This technique may also be employed to the solar-plexus and kidneys and a downward strike can be used into the groin.

If we are concerned about legal ramifications of our defensive actions, then again, the palm heel strike is a good option. Open hand striking techniques are perceived as being less aggressive and more defensive by onlookers or witnesses, making it an ideal choice if a pre-emptive strike is called for. The palm heel strike can allow for lower levels of force to be used and remain effective so permanent or severe injury is less likely than if a full-force blow is used or an elbow or fist, for example.

At MCSDA we employ three versions of the palm heel strike.

1. The lead hand palm heel 'jab'
2. The rear hand palm heel 'power strike'
3. The Fairbairn 'chin-jab'

All three strikes are utilised as 'entry techniques' making an opening for a follow up strike or kick. The Fairbairn chin jab is practised from a lying position as well as standing, against a wall and sitting.

The other type of palm strike is the 'slap' although nowhere near as damaging or effective as the palm heel strike, it is a useful self-defence tool nonetheless. The palm slap utilises the whole of the surface area of the hand - the palm itself. This is a much wider impact area than that employed in the palm heel strike and has a different function accordingly.

Whilst the palm heel strike is capable of delivering penetrating power the slap does not have the same capability. However, when used correctly it can be an excellent distraction strike and when utilised with a slightly cupped hand it becomes very powerful (ask anyone who has had the 'pleasure' of being on the receiving end of a Dave Turton power-slap!).

SELF PROTECTION



Farbairn chin jab

Because the slap uses a wide striking area it is best utilised against the face where the wide impact area can affect many, many nerve endings simultaneously causing shock, pain and disorientation. When used against the face it often results in tearing of the eyes, reducing an opponent's vision temporarily. Slaps usually cause no lasting or long term damage.

The exception to this rule is that if the cupped hand is used against the ear. In my book *Vital Knowledge*, I discuss the effects of striking to the ear with a cupped palm.

"Blows delivered with a cupped hand to the ear, force air down the internal passage possibly bursting the eardrum. As painful as a ruptured eardrum is, it is not the main reason for the high strategic value of this target. Behind the eardrum lies the inner ear and within it are the semi-circular canals, (Utricile) which



Cupped palm strike to ears

effectively act as 'spirit levels' for the brain and are vital in maintaining the body's' balance."

If the semi-circular canals are disrupted it can result in an opponent being unable to stand, rendering him *hors' de combat*. A cupped hand strike (power-slap) to the side of the neck (carotid plexus) is also highly effective and may result in a knock out. As in the case of the palm heel strike, the slap is another 'open hand' strike and so is not usually viewed as being overly aggressive or a high-level force option. Slapping is far more versatile in its delivery options as it may be launched and employed from almost any angle, and along curved trajectories. The relaxed nature of both striking methods means they can be delivered swiftly and with a little practice, very effectively. This makes palm striking a very effective self-defence tool, if not the best, it's certainly a contender. Stay safe everyone.

■ GARY STRINGER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gary Stringer is an executive board member of the Kodo Butoku Renmei (Old Ways Martial Virtues Association). He is an international instructor for **The World Street Combat Systems Organisation**, a member of the **World Association of Martial Arts Masters** and of the **World Sokeship Council - Seishinryoku Kai**. Gary is the Lead Director / Chief Instructor at the **Modern Combatives and Self Defence Academy** www.mcsda.co.uk and a Fellow of the Institute for Martial Arts and Science.