

THE MMA DIET

How to
Fuel Your Tank
for Better Execution of
MMA Techniques and
Self-Defense Moves

by Morné Swanpoel

Photo of Diego Sanchez
by Rick Husted



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As any devoted fan of the UFC will attest, the only way for a mixed martial artist to rise to the top is to follow a scientific training program designed to develop endurance, explosiveness and power. If said MMA fighter fails to pay proper attention to this facet of training, sooner or later he'll gas, and chances are, it will be at the worst possible time — in the middle of a fight while millions are watching.

The most important thing for a fighter to realize is that MMA conditioning is different from the conditioning that's done in other sports. Most types of competition include breaks, timeouts and rest periods, some of which come every time an athlete runs afoul of even a minor rule. Not so in MMA. Whether the action takes place in the octagon or a conventional ring, fights are short, with rounds lasting no more than five minutes. Except for the one-minute breaks between rounds, seldom are there any chances to rest — unless one party sustains a shot to the groin or a thumb to the eye.

MMA FOR YOU

Before you embark on an MMA-inspired training program, you need to design it around your martial arts goals. Do you plan to compete in MMA? As an amateur or a pro? Or are you just looking

to boost your power and endurance for self-defense purposes? If you're readying yourself for cage warfare that unfolds in standard five-minute rounds, your conditioning should be geared specifically for five-minute rounds. If the rules give you one minute of rest between rounds, your routine needs to reflect that, as well.

If, on the other hand, you're thinking self-defense, your routine should be variable so you get accustomed to going all out for as long as it takes to win.

Whatever your focus, conditioning is the most important aspect of training. You need it so you can outlast your opponent, no matter where the fight takes place. You have to be able to act and react without fatigue becoming a factor.

As I remind my students, the will to win is worthless if you don't have the will to prepare.

The specifics of your training program

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Outdoor workouts can add variety to your exercise regimen, helping to make your food discipline seem all the more worthwhile.

also should hinge on your fight strategy. Are you the kind of martial artist who likes to steamroll your opponent in 20 seconds? Or are you more likely to hang on while he wears himself out, then turn up the heat in the third or fourth round to win? Each requires a unique training methodology.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

No matter how you fight, it will involve a high-intensity output from your entire body. For this reason, your first task is organizing your workouts to hit all the muscle groups. That means combining the best exercises in a way that makes sense for MMA.

Remember: Tough is not the way you act; tough is the way you train.

The simplest way to proceed is to create a workout composed of several circuits, each of which represents a round in a fight. During each circuit, do a variety of exercises nonstop for at least five minutes. Once you've become accustomed to that, stack three to five circuits on top of each other.

All mixed martial artists need strength. Having more strength than your opponent has is always advantageous. But while building strength is good, building endurance is better. In fact, building strength is not good if your conditioning suffers be-

cause of it. Recall the words of Dan Inosanto: "If you're tired, you're not strong; if you're tired, you're not fast; if you're tired, you don't have good technique; and if you're tired, you're not even smart."

The good news for busy people is, your conditioning workout doesn't have to last extraordinarily long, and you need only

perform it two or three times a week.

SPICE OF LIFE

Subjecting your body to a variety of stressors is the best way to force it to adapt and grow. One way to do that is to vary your training environment. If the location in which you live permits, do some

Get creative! Self-defense and MMA require a variety of conditioning for maximum impact during those critical seconds.

Photo Courtesy of Morné Swanpoel





Resistance bands are one of the best purchases you can make to start building stamina, explosive strength and conditioning, says the author.

of your workouts at sea level, in the highlands and in the mountains. Exercise in humid and dry conditions, as well as in warm and cold temperatures.

Variety is also important when it comes to selecting exercises. Always think “full body.” That way, you’ll simulate the demands fighting places on your physique. Your body must function — and be trained — as an integrated unit, not as

isolated muscle groups.

The following drills and exercises, especially when done in an explosive manner, are recommended because they don’t require equipment:

- Conventional Push-Ups
- Plyometric Push-Ups
- Bodyweight Squats
- Lunges

- Squat Jumps
- Pull-Ups
- Sit-Ups

If you have some funds to invest, two of the best purchases you can make are a medicine ball (for squats, among other things) and a set of resistance bands (for

LOFTY GOALS

One physiological factor that boosts the output of all athletes is an increase in the number of red blood cells in their bloodstream. More of them means more oxygen can be carried from your lungs to your muscles during times of exertion. How do you ramp up the red? By training at altitude. When the air is thin, your body responds by producing more red blood cells, which then carry more oxygen.

Ever wonder why so many MMA fighters live and train at high altitude for several weeks before a big match? Now you know. Their bodies adjust to the thin air, and when they descend, they feel supercharged for several weeks.

This begs the questions, How high is high enough, and how long is long enough? In a recent meeting of experts on altitude training, it was agreed that optimal results are obtained from spending four weeks at about 7,200 feet above sea level. The experts also stated that the effects last for two to three weeks after the athlete descends to the altitude at which he lives.

various exercises). They're all you need to start building stamina, explosive strength and conditioning.

HIT THE ROAD

MMA fighters tend to use a variety of running workouts. The reason is simple: The combat sports require a variety of physical conditioning. It's best to start by running for short periods at a high intensity to mimic the exertion you'll experience in a five-minute round. Even so, it's still possible — and beneficial — to vary the intensity according to the terrain. For example, maybe your normal pace is an eight-minute mile. Doing that's fine, but you'll be better off if you occasionally do a nine-minute mile that takes you up a moderately steep hill or across dry sand at the beach. As an alternative, run stairs outdoors at your local high school or college.

Next on your agenda should be medium runs at moderate intensity. Covering two to three miles each time is ideal. Most MMA fights don't exceed 15 minutes total, so the 15 to 25 minutes an average person needs to go the recommended distance is plenty. Just don't opt for a slow jog that spans an hour or more; it wastes the time and resources that are available for muscle recovery.

I recommend the following: Instead of running five or six miles a day, run two miles two or three times a week. Augment that with sprints twice a week. If you like long-distance runs, you can include them for the mental toughness they foster; just don't cover ground at



Photo Courtesy of Morné Swanpoel

Don't forget cardio training! Be sure to diversify the variables from time to time — whether training indoors or outside — to keep your mind and body alert to new stimuli.

a snail's pace. And don't do them every day because they'll sap the energy you'd put into other forms of roadwork that are more important. Always shoot for variety. When you're ready to jack up the intensity, do so gradually — and never

schedule grueling workouts on consecutive days. You need time to recover.

During the four weeks leading up to the event you're training for, dump the sprints and intervals. They're not MMA-specific enough for this stage of the

game. Instead, focus on jumps, sprawls, foot drills that emphasize speed, core-stabilization exercises, explosive push-ups, reaction drills and MMA-style performance games (movements that are used in a fight, performed as quickly and explosively as possible).

FUEL FOR THE FIGHT

If you were a Formula 1 racer, you'd be very particular about the fuel that was pumped into your vehicle's tank because contaminants can play havoc with your performance. MMA is no different. Unless you eat properly, you can't expect 100 percent from your body in the cage. As they say, you are what you eat.

Consider making a few small changes each week until all your bad habits have been exorcised from your diet. If you don't know where to begin, follow this outline:

- **Week One:** Eliminate soft drinks.

Consume only water, unsweetened tea and 100-percent fruit juices.

- **Week Two:** Triple your intake of fresh vegetables.
- **Week Three:** Monitor your daily protein intake and adjust it according to established guidelines for athletes.
- **Week Four:** Eat five small meals a day instead of three monster meals.
- **Week Five:** Banish artificial sweeteners from your diet.

Continue in this vein until you're eating only the freshest, most nutritional food you can afford. Remember that eating is an integral part of training for any sport, and to be successful, you must manage all components of your life with the singular goal of victory in the cage. Your only limitations are time and genetics — you can make the most of them by training smart. ✖

RECOMMENDED READING

These three articles are excellent adjunct guides to martial arts nutrition matters!

UFC FIGHTER FRANK MIR'S MMA DIET AND TRAINING EXERCISES

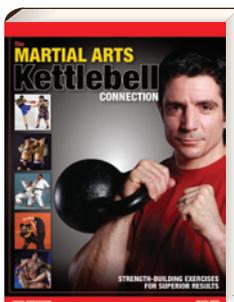
Frank Mir on the dangers of overtraining, the benefits of protein and fish oil, how circuit training works, how to economize your workouts — and much more!

THE GRACIE DIET: THE SECRET TO ROYCE GRACIE'S UFC SUCCESS

Royce Gracie on what to eat, when to eat it, why the equation matters and the transformative potential of its implementation!

WILL NATURAL ENERGY BOOSTERS IMPROVE YOUR MARTIAL ARTS TRAINING?

Are you a professional martial artist? Then you need to sustain your energy levels for long training sessions and in competition, right? This article will get you started on the path to "eating clean" for optimum performance!



THE MARTIAL ARTS KETTLEBELL CONNECTION: Strength-Building Exercises for Superior Results

by John Spezzano

John Spezzano — a Russian Kettlebell-Certified instructor under Pavel Tsatsouline — will help you maximize your strength, stability, explosiveness, stamina and flexibility no matter whether you're training for the arena or the street. 131 pgs. (ISBN: 978-0-89750-193-4)

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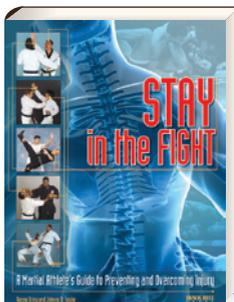


FIGHT NIGHT! The Thinking Fan's Guide to Mixed Martial Arts

by Lita Angeles

Fight Night! *The Thinking Fan's Guide to Mixed Martial Arts* breaks down the essential bread-and-butter terms and techniques for the MMA fan. Starting with the "Americana choke" and ending with the "wrestling clinch," each entry includes a description of the technique, detailed photo sequences of common applications, and educational and entertaining insights. Perfect for loyal followers or viewers new to the arena! 224 full-color pgs. (ISBN-13: 978-0-89750-175-0)

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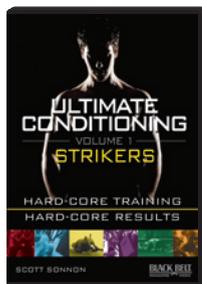


STAY IN THE FIGHT: A Martial Athlete's Guide to Preventing and Overcoming Injury

by Danny Dring and Johnny D. Taylor

Based on the personal experience of the authors, the book teaches readers how to achieve and maintain athletic health through a variety of mental, physical and emotional means. The book also contains personal anecdotes and recovery facts from medical professionals, career athletes and martial arts legends like Joe Lewis and Bill Wallace. 150 pgs. (ISBN: 978-0-89750-187-3)

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ULTIMATE CONDITIONING

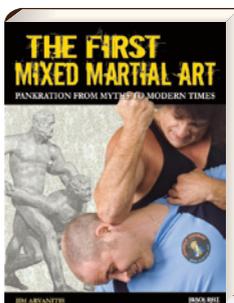
by Scott Sonnon

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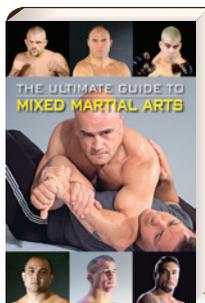


THE FIRST MIXED MARTIAL ART: Pankration From Myths to Modern Times

by Jim Arvanitis

Jim Arvanitis shows you how Greek *pankration* directly influenced the modern techniques of today's fiercest mixed-martial arts fighters. Learn the ancient Greek combat theories to improve your MMA game now! 232 pgs. (ISBN: 978-0-89750-182-8)

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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

by the Editors of Black Belt

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