

Frequently Asked Questions About Aikido and Our Dojo

Why practice aikido?

There are as many reasons for practicing Aikido as there are Aikido students. Here are some common reasons:

- to learn self-defense
- to improve physical fitness
- to reduce stress and bring a sense of calm into one's life
- to increase self-awareness and self-control
- to meet new people and to find a sense of community

Who can practice aikido?

Aikido may be practiced by men and women of all ages and varying athletic abilities. An important part of aikido training is learning to work with people of all different abilities. Aikido does, however, involve repetitive physical movement and learning to fall safely. If you are over age 40 and do not exercise regularly or if you have an injury or medical condition, you may want to check with your doctor prior to beginning aikido practice. If you have specific concerns, please speak with an instructor.

How is aikido different from other martial arts?

Unlike karate, kung fu, and taekwondo, Aikido emphasizes throwing and pinning techniques rather than striking techniques. Aikido techniques lend themselves to controlling an attacker without necessarily needing to harm the attacker. Unlike judo and mixed martial arts, Aikido does not involve competition. Aikido practitioners strive to overcome the need to compete against and triumph over others and instead seek to work together to raise their level of practice.

What “style” of aikido do you teach?

Although there are schools of aikido which profess to teach a particular “style”, aikido is intended to be a flexible, dynamic art, not limited by a fixed or rigid system. Our school does, however, come from a specific, direct lineage to O Sensei’s aikido. Hannah Sensei, the chief instructor, studied with Kanai Sensei, who was an *uchi deshi* (“inner student”) to O Sensei. We strive to faithfully transmit this lineage.

Is aikido practical for self-defense?

Although aikido is a martial art founded on techniques of self-defense, its ultimate goal is perfecting the spirit. Since aikido has much broader goals than just defending oneself by any means, the practice of aikido is likewise designed to further these broader goals and is not exclusively focused on self-defense. If your only interest is self-defense, you may be better served in a self-defense class that specifically focuses on this narrow goal (or consider buying a firearm or large dog). If you share aikido's broader goals and choose to practice diligently over an extended period of time, it is possible to use aikido techniques effectively in a conflict situation (or better yet to avoid the situation all together).

The techniques look choreographed. Do the techniques work if the attacker resists?

Aikido is not competitive and is practiced cooperatively. Particularly at the beginning level, each partner knows in advance what the other is going to do, so in this sense the techniques are choreographed. Any technique, whether from aikido or another martial art, can be countered, particularly if you know beforehand that it is coming. In this context, resisting the technique is not helpful for learning. More advanced training includes more "testing" of technique, but even in this case, the approach is not to force a technique through the resistance of the partner, but to change techniques fluidly to avoid resistance. It is this sensitivity and spontaneous fluidity that ultimately makes aikido effective.

Is aikido a good workout?

Aikido techniques involve coordinating the entire body and are difficult to execute initially. Beginners must practice slowly at first until they learn the movements. As students progress, they are able to practice faster. After the initial stage, aikido practice can be very aerobic. Aikido practice improves flexibility, coordination, muscle tone, and endurance.

Why is there so much bowing?

Aikido is a traditional Japanese martial art and includes traditional Japanese etiquette. This etiquette fosters (and reflects) the mental frame and physical posture that one has prior to any conflict situation. It is an expression of mutual respect in person-to-person encounters and of personal dignity stemming from a peaceful, secure, and stable inner self. Bowing is as essential to the broad goals of aikido practice as are the techniques.

Do you offer children's classes?

We do not offer children's classes at this time. Children aged 13 and up may participate in the adult classes.

I am interested in aikido, but not sure I am ready to start. What should I do?

Stop by the school, observe a class, and speak with an instructor about any concerns you might have. You may also contact us with questions by email, phone, or through this website (see the "Contact Us" page). You may also schedule a free class with us to see if aikido is for you.

I am ready to join. What should I do?

Please arrive at least fifteen minutes prior to a scheduled class to sign up and purchase a uniform (if needed). We accept cash or checks. Students may join at any time of the month.

Do you have contracts?

We do not have contracts. Students may pay monthly or per class and can start and stop at any time.

Do I need a uniform?

You must have an all-white martial arts uniform. Either karate or judo style uniforms are acceptable. You may purchase the uniform through our school or elsewhere.

Where can I park?

You may park at metered spaces on Murray Av., in the metered parking lot behind the building, or in non-metered spaces along the side streets off of Murray Av. Do not park in the Giant Eagle parking lot.

How often should I practice?

Aikido is intended to be a daily practice, although this is not practical for many people given the competing demands in their life. You should set a practice schedule that makes sense for your life situation and your goals. Consistency is important. It is good to practice at least once a week on a regular schedule. It is better to set a realistic schedule that you will be able to stick with than to burn out with an overly ambitious schedule.