

# MARTIAL ARTS FITNESS GUIDE

You've seen *The Raid 2*, now master the moves that will transform you from a sack of flab with the speed and agility of a rusty lawn mower to a lean, hungry street-fighting machine

Martial arts is about fitness for life – and being able to do the mid-air splits



**W**hen most people think about getting involved in martial arts, they're imagining themselves as a nails-hard sensei in some action movie – executing gravity-defying flips, launching into *Street Fighter*-style 360-degree spinning kicks, and embracing their inner warrior. And with the frenetic martial-arts madness of *The Raid 2*, which is out now on DVD and Blu-ray, it's hard not to get carried away. The film, the sequel to 2011's *The Raid*, sees dutiful cop and martial-arts phenomenon

Rama (played by Iko Uwais) go undercover to bring down warring crime families. The action is simply astonishing – unlike anything we've seen on the big screen before. Forget the choreography, what's most impressive is the staggering physical condition of the movie's cast – the result of fine-tuning their bodies for years through martial arts. To find out how to get in shape like a high-kicking, brick-chopping boss, we tracked down two of the UK's leading martial artists – top UK ninjutsu shihan Jake Sharpstone and Xen-Do founder Dai Master Rafael Nieto.

Though schooled in different styles, there's one clear message from both masters: by developing strength, stamina, flexibility and speed, conditioning your body through martial-arts training techniques means conditioning your body forever. "It isn't solely about fighting," said Dai Master Rafael. "The true mantra is 'fit for life'. Martial arts is like a taster menu – you can decide what you want from it, but what you'll always get is a great workout." Follow their tips to help get your body in great martial arts-calibre condition.

## PENCAK SILAT

**INDONESIAN FOR 'KICK ASS'**  
This style seen in *The Raid* movies is a general term for the fast-paced martial arts of Indonesia. It was developed across the thousands of islands that make up the country, with each having its own system for combat. It's designed to take out an opponent quickly before moving on to tackle the next. If you've seen *The Raid* movies, you'll be familiar with the concept.



## 1 LEGS FLEXIBILITY STRETCHES

We all like the idea of stacked, kissable biceps, but building muscle and high-impact exercise come with the risk of cartilage degeneration. This is where flexibility comes in, and both Xen-Do and Ninjutsu teach this as key to the body's longevity. "Sitting in one position all day is about the worst thing you can do," says Jake. "I recommend stretching, it promotes flexibility and ensures your body remains supple into old age. In our martial art, ideally we do at least 40 minutes' flexibility a day and 40 minutes' gentle aerobic exercise, such as walking." Dai Master Rafael agrees with the gentle approach. "Don't hurt yourself. The more you hurt yourself, the more you go against your body and it stiffens up. Also, try to stretch in a warm room. It's hard to hurt yourself in a warm place, because your muscles loosen up." Try doing Jake's stretches (below) every day.



**TIME TO SPLIT**  
"Sit on the floor with legs spread as wide apart as you can. Pivot at the hips and lean forwards. The idea is to separate your legs as much as possible."



**FROGS LEGS, PLEASE**  
"Draw your feet in so your legs are bent and try to push your knees down to the ground. This develops muscles around the rotator joint in the hips."



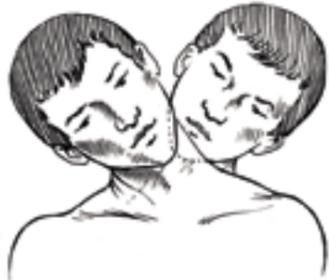
**SEIZA, TAKE A BOW**  
"Lastly, move into a kneeling position – or 'seiza' – then lower yourself down slowly to stretch the front of your thighs and knees."

## 2 GET THE JOINTS JUMPING ROTATION EXERCISES

While we're busy stretching, looking after tendons and muscles, we often forget how important it is to take care of our bones, too.

"All the joints have rotation," says Jake. "If you maintain that rotation, you maintain the joint. Do it daily, because you can also get calcium deposits in the cartilage."

Jake showed us how to perform these simple rotation exercises. They can form part of your basic warm-up or can be done as a light daily routine to keep each joint in tip-top condition.



### HEAD SPINNING

"Stand in a relaxed position and beginning with your neck, slowly rotate each of your joints."



### BACK AND FORTH

"Do approximately ten rotations, forwards then backwards, or left then right, depending on the joint."



### TOP TO TOE

"Slowly work your way down the whole body to the ankles, rotating each joint, one at a time."



Iko Uwais (right) as undercover cop Rama in *The Raid 2*

## 3 EXERCISE YOUR MIND MENTAL STILLNESS

Martial arts conjures ideas of inner tranquillity, of being at one with yourself – a notion most of us probably picked up from the giant meditating rat Splinter in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Never mind that, it doesn't matter where you got the idea – mental preparation and clarity is a very real part of conditioning that's essential for martial arts – it's about the mind as well as the body.

"If you can spend 20-30 minutes a day with a still mind, you have lots more clarity," says Dai Master Rafael. "Every sports champion has had to dream of becoming a champion, they've had to visualise it. Visualisation is the difference between the top 50 athletes and everyone else in any sport. They've put the work in, now they've got the mind game right, too. Of course, without training every day, you still won't become a champion!"

For those who find it hard to switch off, here's a simple counting and breathing exercise Dai Master Rafael swears by.



### EXPERT

**SHIHAN JAKE SHARPSTONE**  
15TH DAN

**Training since:** 1973

**Profile** Founder of two Bujinkan dojos and as close as you can get to a real-life ninja.

**Accolades** Earned judo black belt in 1981. This year reached 15th Dan, ninjutsu's highest rank.

**Fact** Regularly travels to Japan to train with 82-year-old Grandmaster Masaaki Hatsumi, head of the Bujinkan organisation.

**Finishing move** A true Budoka doesn't have one, he says. Even if he did, he wouldn't tell us.

*To find out more about Bujinkan dojos, visit [bujinkan-brighton.co.uk](http://bujinkan-brighton.co.uk)*



### TAKE A BREATHER

"If you try to clear your mind, it's impossible, so sit and when you breathe out, say 'One', and hold that breath for as long as you can."

### STILL COUNTING

"Let your mind attach to the sound of 'One', and you'll have a chance to still your mind. If you can repeat that ten times, you have ten seconds with a still mind."

### SPORTING CHANTS

"As you develop, you can change from a number to a noise that your mind attaches to. Meditation is often done with a chant. To have an hour of still is like doing three or four hours of exercise."

# 4 THIS IS HARDCORE CORE STRENGTH TRAINING

For some martial arts, including Xen-Do, building core strength is fundamental to physical conditioning. To do this, Dai Master Rafael prefers slow, controlled exercises and simple holding techniques over big numbers of high-impact reps. So when doing push-ups, for example, instead of doing as many as you can in the shortest time possible, concentrate on doing them slowly, but keeping good form.

“I like isometric exercises,” he says. “They’re a fantastic way to get your core strength. I also swear by cycling. It’s low-impact and very high in cardio. But don’t do anything to excess. You’re living in your body for 80 years – if you don’t service and look after it you’ll be in trouble. Remember, martial arts are about being fit for life.”

Dai Master Rafael talked us through a couple of basic core-strength exercises that can be done in the comfort of your own living room, without having to pull the bicycle shorts on.

Remember to focus on maintaining good form rather than number of reps. It takes a change of mindset, but you’ll feel the benefit.



**PUSH IT GOOD**  
“Rather than doing 100 push-ups, do ten very slowly.”



**HOLDING ON**  
“Try isometric techniques, such as the plank, for a strong stomach and core.”



**A LEG TO STAND ON**  
“Another simple exercise is to stand, lift your leg high as you can and hold it for ten seconds. See how high you can go and how high you can hold it – strength will develop over time.”



**HARD TIME**  
IKO UWAIS IS A TOUGH MUDDER  
Here’s something you could use core strength for – fighting off about 100 other double-hard inmates in a prison yard that’s muddier than a wet Glastonbury. Which is exactly the situation *The Raid 2*’s hero Rama finds himself in during one of the film’s most high-octane, bone-crunching sequences. All right, it’s not the sort of thing that happens to us most days, but it’s always best to get the exercises in and be prepared. Just in case.



**EXPERT**

**DAI MASTER RAFAEL NIETO**  
Training since 1975

**Profile** Celebrated martial artist – or “beautiful warrior”, as he prefers – and founder of Xen-Do. He runs four dojos in London.

**Accolades** Eight-time national martial-arts champion, represented Britain at the World and European Martial Arts Championships.

**Fact** The cast of *The Raid* movies trained at his dojo when they visited the UK.

**Finishing Move** Jumping spinning sidekick.

To find out more about Xen-Do, visit [xen-do.com](http://xen-do.com)



# 5 HARMONY ON THE INSIDE DIET AND NUTRITION

Nobody needs to be told that conditioning to this level only comes with commitment to a sensible, sustainable diet. Rather than instruct us on a set menu or strict nutrition plan, both Dai Master Rafael and Jake advise eating in harmony with your physical goals. If

martial arts are about physical longevity and being fit for life’ rather than just about fighting, you’ll need to a diet to match.

Rafael says simply: “Breakfast of a king, lunch of a prince, dinner of a pauper. In those meals, no negative calories. It’s a mathematical equation – calories in, calories out.”

Jake gave us a breakdown of his standard food intake, based on the nutritional Japanese diet that goes hand-in-hand with the ninjutsu way of life. You won’t be surprised to hear that burger and chips don’t feature on Jake’s menu.

**The Ninja’s Shopping List**

Luckily, the foods Jake recommends can be found in most supermarkets, so no excuses.

“The Japanese have the healthiest diet in the world. It’s very high in protein, vitamins and minerals,” says Jake.

“We eat a lot of miso soup, edamame beans, wild mushrooms, green tea and rice. The diet also includes plenty of fresh fish and raw fish, as well as seaweed for its high iron content. It’s why Japanese people live longer than anyone else.”



**IKO UWAIS**

**MARTIAL-ARTS LEGEND**

The star of *The Raid* films, Iko Uwais, has trained in martial arts since he was ten years old. He was discovered by director Gareth Evans (yes, he’s Welsh – don’t let his amazing knack for making martial-arts films fool you) – who asked Iko to quit his job as a driver and join production of *The Raid*. That worked out pretty well, we’d say.