



The Karate Gi

“Karate” refers to a form of martial art that originated in Japan. The word “Gi” is a Japanese word for uniform. “Karate Gi” therefore refers to the uniform worn in the study and practice of karate, whether it be for practice or competition.

The karate gi is relatively new. It has only been used since the 1920s. Before the karate gi was implemented, students learning karate would wear something similar to the kimono, called a hakama. The karate gi derived its style and attributes out of necessity. Freedom of movement and comfort in the hot sun of southern Japan influenced karate gi's inception. The light materials, slightly shortened sleeves/pants and robe-like design, mirrors the lifestyle of those who invented it--the farmers and fishermen of Okinawa. Gichin Funakoshi's idea was to implement a uniform in order to promote unity in a socially divided dojo. As karate spread and grew throughout all of Japan in the 20th century, slightly heavier materials and longer sleeves were introduced to make the clothing functional for karate students in colder, northern parts of the country.

The karate gi is composed of 3 pieces of garments; upper body robe, pants and a belt. Though they can already come in black, red or blue, most practitioners still sport the traditional white karate gi. The weight of karate gi is contingent on what you will be using it for. The weight that is available in karate gi is 8, 10, 12, and 14 ounces. There are no standard requirements for the karate gi's material. Students and trainees usually prefer cotton and polyester light materials. Experts who join competition and do heavy-duty training prefer the heavier, thicker and more durable materials.

The different styles of karate gi only differ through the lengths of the sleeves, legs, and the skirt of the jacket. These cuts are known as Japanese, European and Kata. The jacket of the gi crosses left side over the right side. The only exception of this rule is when the undertaker dresses the body for burial and the jacket is crossed right over left. The pants of the gi normally have an elasticated waist making it easy for kids to wear but a traditional gi will have the old-style drawstring closure.

The psychology behind wearing a gi is closely linked to mental health. It promotes commonality among the students, fosters a sense of pride, sets boundaries and helps participants see the dojo and karate class as a working environment. It gives a sense of community, confidence, respect and discipline.