

COPING WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITY IN CONCEALED CARRY AND DEFENSIVE HANDGUN TRAINING

*"The mind is the limiting factor."
-- Robin "Brownie" Brown*

Whatcha gonna do when they come for you? So, we pose the question of combat preparedness. If you are not prepared, even the Good Lord won't be able to save you. So, in this installment, we continue from a previous installment on mental rehearsal. Herein, we will tackle the issue of coping with disabling physical injuries in concealed carry and defensive handgun training.

People with disabling physical injuries and chronic pain are no doubt at a disadvantage. I have chronic pain due to multiple spinal injuries and degenerative arthritis. Believe me, I know! However, it has been proven time and time again that it is possible to leverage adversity into advantage. This is not to say that it is easy to do so. But, winning requires determination. Conviction and faith can enable a mere mortal to obtain results where all other means have failed. Recall that the Bible says (First Corinthians 14:8): "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

Living with pain on a daily basis is tough. So, let's face it. Combat training when it is already hard to move, twist, bend, reach, etc. is hard! However, it is what it is. Training is just what we must do if we are serious about being able to fight with a handgun, long gun, edged weapon, our hands or otherwise. So, what are some of the specific adversities many of us with physical disabilities have to deal with and how can we overcome them, or at least effectively deal with them?

Problem—Increased Vulnerability:

The elderly and people with physical disabilities tend to be victimized by criminals much more frequently than other groups of people. Their need for self-defense training is strong, but unfortunately, many folks are not strong enough physically to stick with serious martial arts training. Many folks try to train in self-defense classes and then re-injure themselves. I know. I have been

there myself. What is the solution? It is certainly not to remain vulnerable to criminal attack!

If an able-bodied, physically strong, criminal attacker launches an attack on an elderly or physically disabled person, the marked disparity of force in the attacker's favor puts the target of the attack at a grave disadvantage. This is opportunistic criminal victimization. In order to even the odds and avoid being victimized, if the potential victim cannot retreat, he or she needs an effective force multiplier that he or she can operate. That would be a firearm. However, the reality is that a handgun or any other firearm is not a magic talisman. If you are not proficient with it, it is nothing but an expensive piece of metal or plastic that could be used against you!

Even though I cope with multiple physical disabilities and chronic pain, I continue to be an avid shooter and concealed carry practitioner. I continue to keep my eyes open for opportunities to learn and to grow.

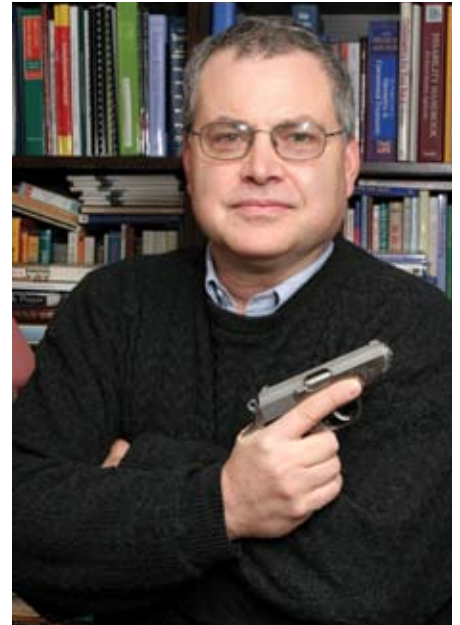
Solution—Convincing yourself to perform physically in order to help your body heal:

A reader of this magazine wrote me and asked how he might go about "convincing my body to perform physically in order to help my body to heal."

We've all heard the old saying, "No pain, no gain." There is truth to it. I have back pain, shoulder pain, blurred vision and stiffness. I visualize myself performing the way I want to perform by keeping in mind the S.M.A.R.T. goal principle. S.M.A.R.T. goals are: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Tangible.

I use positive coping self-talk to get myself moving and to keep moving. This involves what is called "Stress Inoculation Training" (S.I.T.). Employing S.I.T. to cope with constant or recurrent pain, or other repetitive, stressful experiences, has four phases:

Phase 1 of Stress Inoculation Training involves preparing yourself for your oncoming or anticipated stressful experience. This first phase involves



reminding yourself of the coping techniques that you can employ as the stress and pain begin to mount. This phase also involves feeding yourself encouraging but realistic thoughts that put you on the right track. What can you say to yourself at this point? This phase is analogous to Condition Yellow.

During **Phase 2**, after the pain has come on, you begin to employ appropriate coping techniques such as controlling your breathing, relaxing your muscles, talking to yourself in an encouraging way, distracting yourself in some way and thinking of something positive that takes your mind off the pain. The pain has gotten bad and you need to handle it! And, you will! What can you say to yourself to help you cope once the pain comes on? This phase is analogous to Condition Orange.

During **Phase 3** of S.I.T., when the situation begins to turn downright ugly—when the pain is at its worst—you need to be ready to employ your most powerful coping techniques. During this phase, you want to feed yourself your most powerful self talk, to keep you on the right track, so you can get through the storm or the fire, as it were, successfully. This is when things are at their worst, and you want to be at your best! By best, I

mean, psychologically at your strongest, so you have your needed edge. What can you say to remind yourself to use your most powerful coping strategies? When the pain is at its worst, what can you say that will get you through it and help you to ignore the pain? This phase is analogous to Conditions Red and Black.

Finally, **Phase 4**. Thank God for the fourth phase, which means the worst is over. At this point, you want to remind yourself that you got through the pain, and you want to give yourself credit that you handled it well. You coped! You managed it! You fought and won! What can you say to yourself to give yourself credit for handling the situation well?

Clearing limiting mental blocks from your mind:

You cannot give up. You have to tell yourself that you can get past the obstacles you will encounter. What the mind can conceive, the body can achieve. Your mind is your limiting factor. You can mentally rehearse the S.I.T. strategy to prepare yourself to actually use it in vivo. As with Col. Jeff Cooper's Color Codes of Readiness, the magic formula is: Phase 1: living alert and aware (Condition Yellow); Phase 2: practicing and mentally rehearsing coping skills (Condition Orange); Phase 3: employing your coping skills when the going gets tough (Conditions Red and Black); and Phase 4: recognizing your progress and not letting down your guard ever (remaining in Condition Yellow).

Adopt a warrior mentality. Fight through the pain. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Act in spite of your pain. Ignore the pain. Orient to the task at hand. Decide what you must do and just do it.

Everyday problems:

What are some other everyday problems faced by personal defense minded people with physical disabilities?

Problem—Limited endurance and concentration span:

How's your endurance? You need decent endurance in order to train. How's your concentration? For how long can you stay focused to make your practice almost perfect? If you take a class, will you be able to keep up with the class?

Solution—Practice, practice, practice. Shape up. Do Zen Meditation:

Perfect practice makes almost perfect. Develop a personalized exercise program to include (a) improving your

cardiovascular strength and endurance, and (b) strength training (weights) to increase your muscle strength and endurance, and (c) stretching to improve your flexibility.

Zen Meditation improves your concentration. It is simple. Meditate on your breathing for 10 minutes without trying to change your breathing. If your mind wanders and it will, when you are aware that your mind is wandering, shift your attention back to your breathing. Here are the steps:

1. Sit upright on a chair with your spine straight and your feet well grounded, or sit in a traditional lotus posture. Situate your palms facing upwards, right hand on top of your left, thumbs gently touching, hands resting on your lap.
2. Relax your jaw, your tongue resting behind your front top teeth.
3. Tilt your head slightly forward.
4. With your eyes open, gaze dreamily downwards without focusing on anything in particular.
5. Become aware of your breath as it enters and leaves your body with each

inhalation and each exhalation. Focus either on the rising and falling of your abdomen or your breath passing through your nostrils as you inhale and your lips as you exhale.

6. With each exhalation, count one, two, three, etc. Count your breath exhalations to eight.

7. Eventually, you will experience sensations of quietness, peacefulness and stillness. Experience them to your fullest.

8. When you become distracted, as soon as you realize your mind has wandered, bring your attention back to counting your breath exhalations.

Problem—Getting dressed:

Let's begin with donning our gear! Folks that are healthier or more fit may not even give a thought to the difficulties inherent in getting dressed. But, if you have limited range of motion and flexibility in your trunk, back and arms, think about how much more difficult it would be to do the following: put on a belt, slide on, or snap on a belt holster, put on an ankle holster, or don a shoulder holster!

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Think about it for a moment. To put on a belt slide holster, you have to either thread your belt through the holster or thread the holster through your belt, and then position the holster in a concealable and reachable spot on your waist. If the holster has belt loop snaps, you have to be able to twist far enough to reach them and then have the manual dexterity left to snap and unsnap them!

Solution—Choose your gear wisely:

Choose quality products that fit you! This may require some shopping around, but it's worth the time and energy. Look for holsters that are easy to put on and take off and that stay put on your body as opposed to shifting around. Belt slides with sewn belt loops may be too difficult for some to put on and take off with the pants already on. It's easiest to thread a belt slide holster through your belt *before* you put your pants on.

IWB holsters with clips, belt slides with snap loops, and paddle holsters are easier. Even with these however, it may make it easier to position the rig on your belt on your pants before you put your pants on.

Pocket holster carry is also an easy way to go, as are fanny packs. If you are going to choose ankle carry, you will

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have to use an ankle rig that's easy to put on and take off, that is comfortable, concealable and that stays put.

Problem—Presenting your handgun from concealment:

This requires flexibility and coordination. You have to train to get your covering garments out of the way so you can acquire a good grip on your CCW piece. Then you have to be able to smoothly remove your handgun from its holster/carrier and present it to either a combat ready or a firing on target position. Can you present your handgun from concealment and move at the same time so that you are not a static target for Mr. Bad Guy? Can you reach your gun comfortably given where your holster is positioned?




Solution—Position your holster where you can comfortably reach it:

Be aware of where you position your holster on your waist. Make sure you can reach your gun naturally and with ease. You may not be able to carry your gun too far back, as in a kidney position. This may make the draw awkward if you are stiff.


Solution—Practice with an empty, cleared gun and employ mental rehearsal:

Practice drawing from concealment and moving as your draw. Do not be




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a stationary target. Moving targets are hardest to hit. Get your draw stroke down!

Problem—Shooting and moving:

Do you have the requisite finger strength and dexterity to pull the trigger all the way rearward to disengage the sear and discharge the gun multiple times? Do you have the eye/hand

coordination necessary to align your sights and then bring your aligned sights into your visual focus on your point of aim? Can you do this while moving? Can you shoot and then move, all the while scanning for threats as you continue to assess the condition of your target?

Solution—Practice with an empty, cleared gun and also employ mental rehearsal:

Mental rehearsal reinforces and strengthens in your subconscious the actual dry practice steps. The steps for mental rehearsal of the draw from concealment are:

Get comfortable in a chair and get relaxed by taking several slow deep breaths.

Get focused and absorbed by meditating on your breathing (Refer to the previous instructions for doing Zen Meditation). Orient to visualizing the following in your mind's eye:

1. *Look:* Visualize your target and your point of aim. Remember: Aim small, miss small.
2. *Clear:* Visualize yourself (from the first person) moving your habitual covering garments out of the way in a smooth movement as you easily bring your strong hand to your gun.
3. *Draw:* Visualize yourself drawing your handgun up out of your holster and onto your target. Use whichever method of presentation you have learned works best to enable you to get your gun on target with *smoothness* and *speed*.

Practice the steps of the draw with an empty, triple-checked gun and also through mental rehearsal and visualization. After you have each separate step down, visualize everything flowing together in one smooth continuous motion. The goal is economy of motion. Eliminate unnecessary movements.

Problem—Administrative procedures (e.g., cleaning and maintaining your handgun):

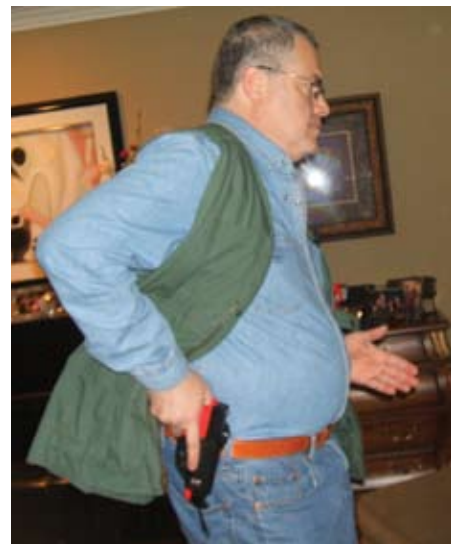
Do you have the hand and finger strength and dexterity to work the action on your handgun—the slide on an autoloader and the cylinder knob and cylinder on a revolver?

If not, you will not be able to chamber a round or clear your gun! You will not be able to take your gun apart for cleaning.

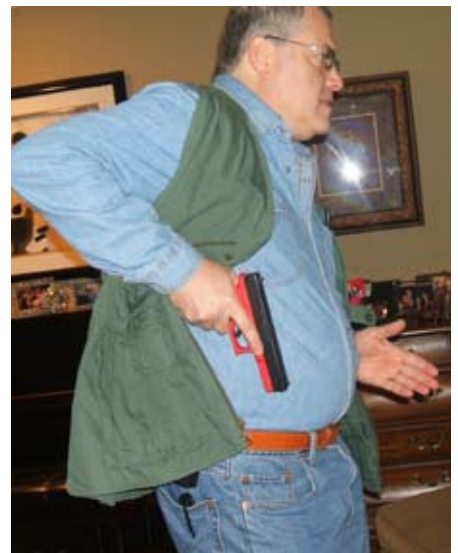
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1) Beginning to clear garment.



2) Grabbing for gun.



3) Lift out of holster.



4) Rock and lock.



5) Bringing support hand to meet strong hand.



6) Hands merge.

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7) Push out.

Solution—Choose the right equipment for you. Practice makes perfect:

If your hand and finger strength and dexterity are impaired, consider a revolver as opposed to an autoloader. If you choose an autoloader, make sure you can work the action. Beretta makes several small autoloaders (.22 LR Bobcat, 25 ACP Jetfire, and .32 ACP Tomcat) with tip up barrels, so you can put a round in the chamber without having to rack the slide.

Summary problem—Chronic pain:
Solutions—Ignore it and fight through it: Listen to your *inner Marine* (soldier, drill sergeant, etc., whatever works for you). *Your mind is your most limiting factor* (Robin "Brownie" Brown). Rise to the occasion. Use positive coping self-talk and S.I.T.

Sources:
Crimson Trace Corporation. 8089 SW Cirrus Drive. Beaverton, OR 97008
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www.crimsontrace.com

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www.PersonalDefenseSolutions.net

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