



HAND PROTECTION ESSENTIALS*

Douglas Olsen, Ph.D., CPT

www.steadystrike.com

The following is based on research and extensive experience and should be taken from this perspective. Although the information is intended to foster hand health, I am not a medical practitioner - concerns of this nature should be directed to appropriate medical personnel.

There are two primary forms of hand protection: (1) hand wraps, and (2) gloves. You will see some opinions regarding whether both are necessary, but it is my opinion that, unless you are hitting a very soft bag, BOTH should be used.

When starting out or getting back into hitting after a while, start slow. This could come in the form of either shorter sessions and/or less intense hitting. Your hands will adjust a bit over time, making you less susceptible to blisters and hand pain. Avoid blisters (usually on the knuckle or pinky) by either shortening the session or pre-emptively using sports tape. Always give your hands time to recover from a blister that does occur or hand pain that is uncomfortable. Again, this is based on experience, if you are concerned about any aspect of your health, see a qualified medical professional.

SELECTING HAND WRAPS

Hand wraps do two fundamental things. First, they hold the bones and ligaments in your hand together when striking the heavy bag. This reduces the likelihood of fracturing bones and/or straining your wrist and other muscles in your hand. Second, they provide additional padding. Here are some options that are available.

- Gauze and Tape. While professionals may use gauze and tape and some amateurs use different types of fabric, neither of these are very practical on a day-to-day basis. This is especially true if you have to wrap your own hands.
- Gloves with Gel Pads. These are mitten-like gloves (these are thinner and worn insight the boxing/bag glove) without fingers. They often have a gel pad across the knuckles. They are convenient to put on and afford some protection. I have found that actual

* **Heavy bag workouts have incredible properties!** Heavy bag training is an amazing exercise on almost every front, given that they: (1) work every muscle group; (2) provide strength training, power development and cardio; (3) improve agility and reaction time; and (4) enhance stability/balance and coordination. While obviously linked to boxing as a training method, it is an exceptional exercise in its own right - many of the people who prosper physically from it have never stepped in a ring or intend to. It is also a sport for all ages. Indeed, some of the agility and stability components are incredibly important as we age.

wraps tend to hold the hand together better, and some will also find that the stitching around the finger holes might cause irritation, especially for longer sessions.

- **180" Fabric Stretchable Fabric with Hook-and-Loop Closures**. These are unquestionably my favorite wraps. Wraps come in multiple lengths. Shorter (e.g., 140") may be adequate for smaller hands, but most people will benefit from 180" (Mexican Style) hand wraps.
- A few things to watch out for. First, there are thinner hand wraps out there - if only using them for one use, they are definitely adequate. Second, when you wash¹ them, the thicker hand wraps tend to hold their shape better, and provide more cushion.
- **Steadystrike Hand Wraps** are 180" long and 2" wide. They are made with a thick 350 thread count fabric, with excellent elasticity and moisture wicking ability (35% Cotton, 65% Nylon Blend). These wraps use hook-and-loop closures that are part of the wrap itself (not a hook-and-loop tab sticking out). From our perspective, these are optimal for most. They function well in use, and keep their shape well after being washed. Make sure to follow care instructions)

GLOVES

Types of Gloves

- You will see many different options out there and we will discuss some of these below. Sometimes the type of glove will vary by sport (e.g., MMA Gloves vs. Boxing Gloves).
- If you plan to have extensive sessions with the heavy bag, MMA style gloves are not generally recommended. This is due to relatively less padding and greater difficulty getting wraps on underneath. The gloves themselves are not "bad" per se, they are simply intended for a different application where grappling is particularly important.
- The general realm of boxing gloves includes subvariants for some specific sports. For example, relative to traditional boxing gloves, Mui Tai gloves have more padding, greater thumb movement and increased mobility of the wrist relative to boxing gloves.
- In this article we are focused on traditional boxing gloves in heavy bag applications. There are two commonly used types: bag gloves and sparring gloves.

¹ Hand wraps absorb sweat from your hands as you work out and reduce the level of moisture in the glove lining. They should be washed occasionally - some suggest every 3-5 uses. Over time I have collected enough hand wraps that I typically only use them once before washing (my sessions are also longer in nature). Either hand wash, or make sure to wash in a mesh bag if using a washing machine. Then, either air dry or dry on a low temperature.

- “Bag gloves” tend to be made of more resilient and dense materials than gloves used for sparring, and as such, you should NOT use bag gloves for sparring. Some will not completely cover the thumbs, others will – my general preference is for bag gloves that do cover the thumb and with thumbs that are attached to the glove.
- Sparring gloves tend to be softer for purposes of safety. You CAN use sparring gloves for hitting the bag IF you want to use them exclusively for this purpose. However, because they are softer, they will break down more quickly if engaged in extensive heavy bag sessions. Because of this, they may no longer be safe to use in sparring and may need to be replaced more frequently than bag gloves.

Weight of Gloves

- Boxing gloves range from 8 oz. to 48 oz. – guidelines will be provided below, but there is NO “right” answer. For example, and I use 12 oz, 16 oz., 36 oz. and 48 oz. gloves, depending on the workout desired.
- Guidelines sometimes base selection on athlete weight. This may serve as a good starting point, but these are only guidelines. A lighter athlete might want to train with a heavier glove, and a heavier athlete may want to train with a lighter glove – some change it up with every bag workout. Regardless of weight, make sure they fit your hand properly.
- Lighter gloves (e.g., 10 to 14) tend to be much faster and can often be used for a longer session (assuming they are still providing adequate hand protection). Heavier gloves will have more padding/protection and can be used to develop strength/power. Many of my sessions will involve both (heavy for the first set of rounds, lighter for the second set). I still get a rush over how my hands feel like they are flying when I change over!
- Here are some guidelines that are often provided for the more common glove weights:

8 to 10 oz.	Good if smaller hands and/or speed is the goal. Be careful about hand pocket size. Often suggested for a 75 - 105 lb. athlete. ²
12 oz.	Great for speed training and usually afford adequate protection if using hand wraps as well. Often suggested for a 106 - 129 lb. athlete. ²
14 to 18 oz.	These work well for bag work, especially longer sessions. The appropriate size will depend on the nature of the hitting and also the size of the person. Many will find 14 oz. acceptable, but those “throwing hard” and/or of larger size may prefer 16 oz. or even 18 oz. (16 oz. would be more standard). 14 oz. are suggested for athletes 130 - 159 lbs. ² ; and, 16 oz. (or higher) for those over 160+ lbs. ²
Over 18 oz.	These are great for building power and providing more of a physical workout. For example, 48 oz. gloves are adding another two pounds per hand to the workout.

Hand Size & Hot Spots

- Everybody is quick to talk about the weight of the glove, but hand size is critical! You do not want a glove that you cannot get your hand into, or conversely, one where it floats around.
- Especially if you have larger hands, be careful about selecting lighter gloves (e.g., 12 oz.) - the hand pocket can often be too small, especially if using hand wraps.
- Check information provided by the manufacturer/retail site regarding hand size - and preferably use a retailer who will refund/replace these. Test for fit and then return them in "as new" condition.
- I find that manufacturers will vary in terms of what is considered S, M, L, XL, but here are some general guidelines provided by Ringside® (measured with hand wraps off) for bag gloves, with these measurements referring to hand circumference (around the palm and back of the hand).
 - Small 6" - 7 1/2"
 - Medium 7 1/4" to 8 1/2"
 - Large 8 1/4" to 9 3/4"
 - Extra Large 9 3/4" to 11"
- When you try the gloves on, make sure you are wearing hand wraps in order to assess whether they will fit or not. You want a snug fit, but not one that is not constricting. Gloves will break in a little over time.
- Each hand (and each glove) is unique. It is not uncommon to find a "hot spot" when initially wearing new gloves, even if you are properly wearing hand wraps. For example, a common place for me is the outside of my pinky finger.
- If you start to experience a hotspot...STOP. Make sure to cover that spot up with additional material (e.g., athletic tape). Otherwise you are going to get a blister and this can take a while to heal. Over time you will likely find that your hand will adjust (e.g., a thickening of the skin in "hot spot" areas) and the gloves will break in. Much like shoes.

Type of Materials

- Palm. The type of materials may impact both the breathability of the glove and the way they feel when hitting the bag. Most gloves manufactured today have decent ventilation in the palm area through the use of holes/perforations and perhaps mesh. Combined with moisture wicking hand wraps, an excessive build up of moisture around the hands is typically not an issue while in use. Of course, your hands will still sweat and it will be important to air gloves out after use, but you should never feel like your hands are swishing around inside the glove. Disinfectants, deodorizers and glove dryers exist. My experience has been that as long as I air dry them immediately after use I do not have any issues.
- Padding. There are all sorts of options out there involving foam and all involve latex padding. There are multiple elements associated with the padding, the density of the foam, the thickness of the foam and the contour of the foam.

- Some gloves will have multiple layers of foam for the padding, for example, high density foam sandwiched between two medium density layers.
- You will also see Gel Gloves. These still use latex foam, but have an upper layer that is gel based. The key argument made for these gloves would be that they diffuse the shock from the impact over a greater surface of the glove. People also report that they wear well. The key complaint from some is that they create a different weight profile, but any new glove will often feel "different" at first.
- While the fundamentals of hand protection need to be observed, the specific type(s) of gloves you prefer will be much about your personal preference. I have an arsenal of gloves acquired over years, but there are three brands in particular that work reliably for me and my hitting style. The general feel of the glove can vary a lot based on the material and contouring of the padding.
- Outer Layer (Shell). This is another preference thing. I do not mind hitting a synthetic bag, but I hate hitting any bag with an outer synthetic layer...especially with less expensive gloves. They seem to grab the bag more (in a bad way) and feel less natural. For me, the outer layer has to be leather. On the positive side, synthetic gloves will tend to be less expensive.

Type of Closure

There are two fundamental types of glove closures, laces and hook-and-loop (often referred to as "Velcro").

- Lace up gloves are still present and can provide a more secure fit because they are tightened in multiple places. However, these tend to be more for actual fight use.
- For both convenience and ease, hook-and-loop closures are preferred. They usually provide excellent wrist support as well.
- For most people, a single hook-and-loop closure may be ideal as they tend to be easier to put on. I have used single hook-and-loop and double hook-and-loop gloves (usually on heavier gloves) and I am sure there is some difference, but the double hook-and-loop gloves (i.e., with two straps around the wrist) are more work to get on and take off.

How Much Should I Spend?

There is a sweet spot here.

- Do not go extra cheap when buying gloves - especially when starting. If you enter the sport thinking "I am going to save \$\$\$ here in case I do not like it," - chances are you will not enjoy the experience that much and may want to abandon the sport entirely. Granted, if money is tight, it is better to wear lower-end gloves than nothing at all, but know that as you spend more, the nature of the heavy bag experience will improve...up to a point.
- There are diminishing returns as the price increases - going from a \$40 glove to an \$100 glove will likely be very noticeable...moving from \$100 to \$160 less so, and so forth.
- My starting point would be about \$100, but there are acceptable gloves on the market for less than this. Remember to focus on the fundamentals above (weight, size, shape, material and so forth). I would strongly recommend a leather shell.

- In my opinion, there are some rip-offs out there, playing on past brand reputation and/or the age-old notion that the higher the price, the higher the quality. There can be some truth to this correlation when moving from \$40 gloves to \$100 gloves, but after this, the correlation is less than perfect.
- Given our focus on stands, **Steadystrike** does not sell gloves of any nature. This does not mean that we do not think this is important. You are an athlete, treat gloves as an investment in your performance and progression. Saving money on gloves will likely result in an inferior experience, as well as potentially less protection and/or quicker wear.