



## *Incredible Secrets of Aikido Revealed*

*-- A Beginner's Guide --*



## Welcome

Welcome to Griffith Aikido. If you ask around the dojo you will find that all of us seem to have different reasons for starting Aikido. It may be to learn self-defence, it may be for fitness. There are many other reasons and those who stay invariably achieve those initial goals. Usually however, they achieve much, much more. Because each of us brings our own talent and life experience to the art, your progress will be a very individual thing. Truly has it been said that there are many ways to the top of the mountain.

Although Aikido is a martial art steeped in the ancient traditions of Japanese Budo (the way of the warrior), it has much to offer you in helping you cope with our modern lifestyle. There are many unexpected benefits such as greater awareness, calmness and relaxation which are all extremely useful outside the dojo in our daily lives. Perhaps the greatest benefit is becoming part of a wonderfully encouraging, supportive community. We all help one another to learn and progress.

That encouragement and support commences with this booklet as it has been prepared by fellow club members. They are just a bit further ahead on their Aikido journeys and can warn you of various pitfalls. My own attitude is that I have made many mistakes along the way so I can save all of you a lot of time! All of us gain great enjoyment and self development from Aikido and we want you to do the same.

In the beginning there can be great confusion. Nearly all of us feel that. If you think of Aikido as a big jigsaw puzzle with pieces gradually dropping in to place, the learning process becomes easier. During some lessons only one new piece of the puzzle fits, in others maybe three or four pieces. Bit by bit the gaps in the puzzle are filled. If you constantly look at techniques with "Beginner's Mind" then you can be assured that the learning never stops. Even highly ranked students continue to make progress in this way.

We have structured our beginner's courses and early classes to help you grasp the basics of Aikido and give you a foundation from which you can learn into the future. Aikido has much to offer you if you embrace its many facets and we encourage you to keep exploring, keep discovering and keep enjoying.

Welcome to Griffith Aikido. I hope that your stay with us is long and rewarding.

Rod Nixon-Smith  
(Head Dojo Instructor)

### Please note

This booklet is provided for information purposes only, and for no other purpose. It is meant to assist association members to learn the art, philosophy, and etiquette of aikido as well as provide other information about the association and the way we conduct both our on-mat and off-mat activities. This booklet does not take the place of instruction. Activities in the dojo must only be undertaken with the supervision of a certified instructor. This booklet is able to be copied and distributed freely in all or in part, but only with the permission of the Griffith Aikido Institute Inc..

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## Incredible Secrets of Aikido Revealed

Well..., the 'secrets' of aikido are more like open secrets. They're like pearls of wisdom that aren't particularly well known or which aren't obvious. I hope you're not disappointed, because there is much about aikido that really is incredible. The really fundamental secret of aikido is that all those who practice aikido are beginners. There is always more to learn. If you've just started, then you've simply spent less time being a beginner than the rest of us.

Unfortunately, there are no secrets of aikido which turn you into a black-belt overnight, or a martial arts machine. You'd be able to find them on the internet, which means they wouldn't be secrets. There also wouldn't be any need for the rest of this booklet!

It isn't well known (perhaps we can call it a secret) that while aikido is an effective martial art and is a great form of self-defence, it is also much more if you are open to what aikido can offer. The real secrets of aikido are found within us (yes, I know - it sounds very convenient in the absence of more tangible secrets), and refers to what aikido can contribute in our approach to life, what it can come to mean to us, and what we can draw from it.

As the founder of aikido, Morihei Ueshiba said:

"Progress comes to those who train in the inner and outer factors. Do not chase after secret techniques for everything is right before your eyes."

Otherwise, I know that you will find that aikido is fun, and that it offers skills worth learning which can be incorporated into your life to make it richer.

What I can also give you is real and tangible information about Griffith Aikido, and some insights (let's call them secrets) into getting started which I hope makes the transition from non-beginner to beginner a little easier.

### **Griffith Aikido Institute Inc.**

Griffith Aikido has been operating since 1981. As a registered university club it is staffed by experienced volunteer instructors, some with over 20 years of aikido experience. Our association is affiliated with Aikido Yuishinkai International with student certification issued directly from Japan.

Our head dojo is at the Griffith University Nathan campus with classes also held at Everton Hills dojo. We have plenty of classes each week (please see our website), including kids classes.

Griffith Aikido is one of the biggest and longest running Aikido Yuishinkai clubs in Australia. While this means quite a few members (they don't all train at once), it also means diversity and you will fit in. We pride ourselves on our approach to beginners and the resources we have for them. All our instructors and senior members are happy to answer any questions you have.

## Griffith Aikido Structure

Hopefully you're thinking aikido is right for you. The next question is whether Griffith Aikido is right for you. The great thing about Griffith Aikido besides its members and instructors (and that's the main part) is that it's non-profit. Everyone is here because they want to be. Instructors are volunteers – they teach because they want to. They teach to pass on their knowledge and skills. Everyone is valued and everyone has input.

Griffith Aikido currently has a main dojo (Nathan) and one other dojo (Everton Hills dojo). Full monthly fees paid at Nathan allow students to train at as many Nathan classes as they wish. Nathan also has a 'lite' fee to assist those who only train once a week. Members can also pay casually on a single class basis. Everton Hills dojo is a PCYC and has a separate fee structure.

Griffith Aikido is run as an incorporated association according to Queensland Government regulations, and as a Griffith University club, with a Management Committee elected at an Annual General Meeting. Every member is encouraged to take part in this democratic process. Generally, most beginners are pretty content to get a handle on their aikido before wanting to contribute to the running of the club. Just ask, though, if you've got a desire to be more involved. The Executive will be pleased to have some assistance.

An aikido class on the mat, however, is a different and rather undemocratic place. Some say you're stepping into feudal Japan when you step onto the mat. It's not really like that, but you get the picture. It's about respect, and the instructor is in charge. This is for safety, as well as traditional reasons. We're learning a martial art, after all. It's also a classroom, so there's a strong expectation during class to listen quietly and ask any questions after the instructor stops talking.

## So You've Decided To Do Aikido

So – you've begun aikido training. It might not seem like it now, but the confusion and mystery which you're experiencing will lift, and you may come to value the time when aikido was brand new and you were able to simply enjoy it for whatever reason attracted you in the first place. One of the great things about aikido is that it attracts many different types of people for all sorts of different reasons. Everyone's welcome. We've compiled this beginner's information as a specific resource to those members just starting with us, as our beginners are valued by all club members. They bring freshness and a wonder about the world of aikido which is a quality that is actually sought and prized by senior aikido practitioners. New members also provide an opportunity for more senior club members to pass on their skills and in doing so, enhance their own skills. As you can see, aikido is a cooperative martial art. Let's consider the things which you're probably thinking about as a beginner:

## Is Aikido For Me?

Is aikido for me? Is aikido the best martial art? The first question is up to you. The second is the question all martial arts ask. We don't concern ourselves with that

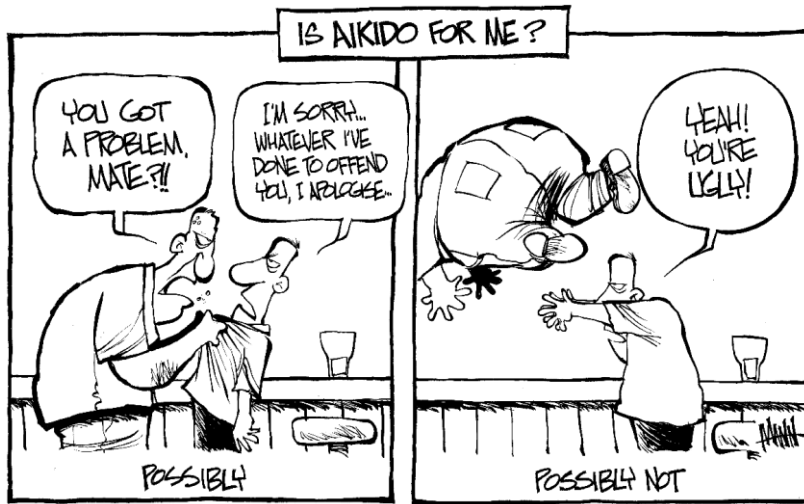
question. It's an ego question and it's extraordinarily difficult to fairly compare different martial arts. Realistically, those doing aikido aren't just learning self-defence on the chance they may be attacked one day, although it may be a major reason. They're probably looking for some of the other things that come with it too. It's a great deal of fun for a start. Training occurs in a friendly and fun atmosphere which is also safe and respectful of everyone. Everyone is valued and beginners are highly valued, as they have much to contribute and even teach those who have been training for a while. There's a strong social aspect when club members are all doing something they enjoy, and like any club, they get to know each other quite well and friendships are made and developed. There's learning a useful skill rather than just walking or running or pumping weights at the gym. Not that there's anything wrong with that!

Aikido develops fitness and flexibility and promotes health and well-being. It values a relaxed body and focussed mind as well as a strong mind-body coordination which the techniques help everyone to achieve. Aikido includes ki training (for experiencing and understanding the use of our body's energy system and how it applies to aikido and aikido technique), breathing, relaxation and meditation techniques within its teaching, as achieving a relaxed and meditative mind significantly enhances the practice and effectiveness of aikido and aikido techniques. All these aspects of aikido can be applied positively to everyday life. Of course, self-defence can enhance our lives and learning open-hand and weapons techniques are central to aikido teaching. Aikido is very special in offering self-defence, as well as other positive aspects to really enhance our lives.

At the same time, if we're really interested in self-defence, then aikido delivers true self-defence. Controlling an attack and immobilising an attacker without having to inflict injury is a self-defence which is clearly focussed on defence of self and not on any form of direct conflict.

While aikido is a true self-defence, it is very effective martially, even though it does not include attacks in its repertoire. Aikido looks a little like dancing with very circular movements a lot of the time. It doesn't look like fighting, but it is deceptive in that it uses an attacker's apparent advantages of strength and speed and momentum against them. The techniques employed are all defensive. It must be very frustrating for an attacker to be denied the responses he is expecting and to have all his strength and aggression redirected to the point where he ends up pinned with no idea how he arrived in this predicament and with a suspicion that he somehow caused it to happen.

Aikido is not a martial art which attracts those who want to learn a confrontational style of conflict resolution. They find other martial arts. You'll be hard pressed finding anybody whose motivation to do aikido is to learn to fight. You've probably found already that there is a spiritual element to aikido, as well as an approach which values service and having a strong and relaxed mind. If you want to learn self-defence in a fun atmosphere and integrate its benefits into your life and lifestyle, then aikido is probably right for you. You can take what you want from aikido and discard the rest if you want to. Nobody is ever going to judge you if you want to only focus on the 'self-defence'. Or if you prefer open-hand techniques and don't want to do weapons. Or that your attraction is to meditation and calming the mind. Ask other club members what they get out of aikido. You'll be surprised by the wide variation of response. There's genuinely something in it for everyone.



### Confusion

Well, you're either picking things up really quickly, in which case you're in the small minority that are born to aikido, or you're like the rest of us. Either way, you're probably confused. Being a little confused or a lot confused is basically universal. Everyone is. You may be worried that you're not really getting it, and as soon as you learn something there's something else to learn and you seem to be forgetting the stuff you thought you'd learned already.

The message is that everyone feels this way – the answer is to give it some time, and keep on training and it will start to make sense, and it's guaranteed that you will be pleased that you stuck with it. While you may think you're forgetting techniques, your body will remember them and when you return to techniques you will be more familiar with them. Further, a lot of the point of aikido training is about learning balance and blending and awareness and relaxation (crucial to good aikido) and this won't be lost. In fact, you will realise soon that the principles of aikido are much more important than the techniques themselves. Techniques can be seen as a mere means to learn and fully understand the principles. You will progress without realising it.

Give aikido a chance to show you how good it can be for you. The reasons people find aikido and begin training are widely varied, but nobody begins aikido expecting to learn self-defence in a couple of weeks. It doesn't work like that and nobody expects that it does, and nobody expects beginners to be producing beautiful techniques in a couple of weeks. You may think you're not particularly good, but the reality is that most senior club members are probably admiring your beginnings in aikido and quietly thinking that you're probably more advanced than they were at your stage of learning.

Part of the whole point of aikido is perseverance and regular practice. Some aspects of aikido just can't be head-learnt, they have to be body-learnt and it takes time. The balance and blending and awareness and relaxation aspects of aikido training need to be absorbed over time and become a part of your body and mind.

Just a little advice here. As a beginner, you may be considering training once a week, which is great. This will maintain you at a particular level, and progress will occur – but it will be slowish. There are some very good aikido practitioners who have learnt and progressed in aikido as once-a-weekers. There is never any pressure to do more, as everyone's circumstances are different and any restrictions on you are respected. However, you will find progression in aikido is much more noticeable and satisfying if you consider training at least twice or even three times a week. It will also lift the veil of confusion much more quickly.

### Terminology

Part of the confusion you experience may arise due to the use of Japanese words and terms. Even the Japanese traditions of respect and spirituality which are contained in aikido are somewhat foreign. As with everything in aikido, it seems to be about time. The prevailing wisdom is that the whole terminology of techniques starts to make sense after you've graded to yellow belt. That means you'll absorb the names as you go. It also means nobody expects you to know names for quite a while. (You'll notice the instructors forget from time to time!!) If you want to know the name of a technique – just ask. Really, it's just jargon. Believe it or not, it's actually easier. It's much easier to learn 'yokomenuchi' as the name of an attack, for example, rather than 'angled sword cut slicing from neck to opposite hip which is now translated into an open-hand attack but represents a probable broken bottle or knife attack'. It's even easier than 'angled attack to temple'.



### Discomfort/Soreness

Aikido is a new physical activity that your body is probably unprepared for. Again, give it time. You may find that you have experienced some soreness or even tweaked

some muscles that you didn't know you had. Even very fit athletes beginning aikido have experienced the discovery of new muscles! So some soreness can be expected initially as various under-used muscles crank up their activity. The extensive warm-ups and rolling practice will help protect you from injury but not the initial soreness. Again, giving it time for your body to adapt is the key. Training more than once a week will also lift your aikido fitness so that soreness will diminish and disappear as an issue very quickly. If you are doing aikido with improved fitness in mind, it becomes progressively more aerobic as you progress.



## Etiquette

The simple message here is – ask, ask, ask. Etiquette is simply the rules of behaviour that apply in the dojo. They might seem a little unusual in our Western society, but they rely heavily on Japanese tradition and are basically about respect and safety. Respect for self and others, respect for the dojo. Bowing, for example, is about respecting your training partner who is actually doing you a great favour by agreeing to train with you and is thanking them for teaching you. The bow also functions very effectively as a safety signal during training which indicates “I am ready”.

Just so you know, as beginners aren't sure what is said at the start and end of class. Onegaishimasu (on-e-guy-she-mus) is said at the beginning of class and means roughly 'thankyou for what you are about to teach' Although we all bow to 'Sensei teacher' it is actually a bow to each other

Domoarigatogozaimashita (do-mo-ari-ga-to-go-zuy-mush-it-a) thank you very much. This is said at the end of class to thank each other for training together.

Once again, these are actions of respect. The club takes respect very seriously, and not just for safety reasons. Etiquette is also about respecting the traditions which aikido has been developed from, and those traditions are big on respect! However, everyone realises that it takes time to become familiar with expectations. All you have to remember as a beginner is that if you respect others, bow a lot, and ask a lot of questions you won't commit any serious breaches of etiquette.

Having said that the club takes respect very seriously, it also takes enjoying raining and having fun very seriously. The two are not mutually exclusive. Essentially, the rules that you have to understand as a beginner are to be safe (first), be respectful and have fun. You don't have to do anything you don't want to.

If you don't know what expectations exist in a particular situation, just ask a senior club member. They will be happy to fill you in. Senior members like feeling useful, and this is one of the ways you can help them feel useful!

## Payment of Monthly Fees

It is proper etiquette to pay training fees when they are due which is always at the beginning of each month. Our training fees are kept to a minimum to encourage as many people as possible to enjoy the art of aikido, but without fees, no club can function properly. Our instructors work numerous hours to pass on their knowledge and they do so on a voluntary basis. In spite of this there are many significant costs involved in keeping the club functioning properly, such as purchase of mats, rent of dojo space, and the enjoyment of having experienced teachers visit from other states or countries.

Whoever trains with our club is fortunate that we give great consideration to students, school children and anyone else who may need to be considered for a concession fee. If you have genuine problems which arise, but wish to keep training, then of course the club wants to help. It's very simple and easy. You only have to speak to one of the instructors or club executive. You'll have noticed that they're all very approachable. It's unfair to make them approach you to sort out payment of fees!

If fees can't be paid on time, then you need to be up front and advise when they will be paid, usually within the next week. If this is still a problem, you need to arrange how you intend to continue training, and if you need to reach an agreement of some sort. You can always train on a per class, casual basis.

## Grading

The grading system in aikido has been carefully formulated to complement and reinforce the curriculum being taught. It is a very important part of your aikido training.

As mentioned already, you will progress without realising it, in which case you will be asked to grade at some point. Some people love the grading system. It gives them something to strive for and achieve and gives them evidence they are progressing. It provides recognition of their perseverance and improvement in technique, awareness and understanding of the art.

At the same time, there are some who feel no need to grade, preferring to just train. However, they should understand that they do rely on the dojo and others for effective training. Aikido is about cooperation with training partners, and learning from each other. There are very good reasons to grade which go beyond the important recognition of personal achievement. The coloured belt system of grading allows for much greater dojo safety by providing an immediate understanding of approximate proficiency levels of partners, as well as allowing more senior partners to effectively pass on appropriate assistance during training, depending on the relative ability of their training partner. Furthermore, the head dojo instructor has a responsibility to appropriately grade all their students. It is a sign of respect for the chief dojo instructor that you accept their assessment that you have acquired a particular skill level and are ready for grading.

### **1st Grading**

Grading is not a pass/fail situation. Don't be worried that you'll embarrass yourself. If you have been asked to grade you have been recognised as having already progressed to that level and you can be assured that you are ready. Senior members will be impressed by your progress and advances, not the deficiencies that you think you have. If you think you need help to prepare, it is simply a matter of asking but you will probably be offered assistance long before you have to ask.

The techniques you cover in your 1<sup>st</sup> grading are listed in the Aikido Yuishinkai Student Guide, and they are covered in the beginners course. If you haven't done the beginners course, just make sure you ask for some guidance.\*

The grading itself is not an exam. It is a demonstration to your instructors and fellow students that you are proficient at that level. You'll be given plenty of time to prepare in class and there are plenty of senior students and instructors willing to help you. In fact, it is your preparation for grading which is probably more important than the grading itself. Attitude and application say as much about someone as their ability, and aikido is not simply about self-defence.

The techniques covered in the first grading – 7th kyu are:

Katatekosadori kokyunage – cross hand hold  
Katatedori tenkan kokyunage – same side hold  
Kokyu dosa – two-hand hold conducted in a seiza (kneeling with hips on heels) position.

\* For more information on grading, please see the Aikido Yuishinkai Student Guide

### **Resources**

We are very, very spoiled. Our club has many resources worth taking advantage of. A book or video can be a tremendous resource, with different aspects of its content applying at different levels of aikido understanding and ability. The club has a large

library containing a wide range of books and DVD's to the extent that we are spoiled in comparison to other aikido clubs.

A Student Handbook is available for purchase which is a fantastic investment in your aikido. Some more advice – buy one. It is invaluable in the scope and quality of information it provides directly to those practicing with our club.

An Aikido DVD detailing many aspects of our particular style of aikido is also available for purchase. It also represents incredible value. It is fantastic for both beginners and seniors alike. It was produced with Griffith Aikido financial assistance, and the expertise of Simon Russell, one of the club's alumni instructors.

And talking about instructors, our club is very spoiled for the number of senior students and highly qualified instructors that are available. It means that the club has a great deal of varied aikido experience. The club has two dojos and lots of times to train. And the point is that they are there for all club members to take advantage of. Please do so.

### **About The Founder Of Aikido Yuishinkai**

Koretoshi Maruyama was a student of the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, and although he tried and achieved success in other martial arts, he dedicated himself to aikido, the martial art that taught the principles of mind and Ki. He eventually came to hold the position of President of Ki no Kenkyukai (Ki Society) in 1990. He resigned from this position in 1991 and spent 10 years in a temple in Saitama Prefecture, intensively training in the philosophy and practice that 'You are fundamentally Mind.' He left the temple in 2001, during which time he had received permission from the temple priest to establish Aikido Yuishinkai, which he has continued to develop until the present day.\*

As a result of this 10-year period of training, he developed the Motto for Members of Aikido Yuishinkai.

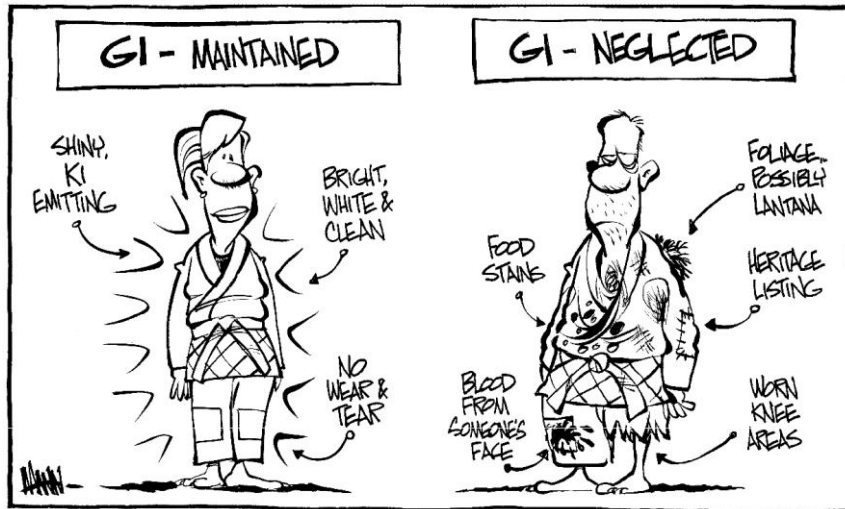
The Motto for members:

I am mind itself.  
If I hold positive thoughts in my mind, good things are likely to happen.  
Holding negative thoughts in my mind works against my best interests.  
Therefore, even if my body suffers physically, my mind remains optimistic.  
Even if I encounter obstacles, my mind is never defeated.  
Daily I fill my heart with thoughts of joy, gratitude and hope. I face each new day with a bright and optimistic spirit, which I express in word and deed.  
I have faith in life, and life responds in kind.

\* For more information about Maruyama Sensei, please see the Aikido Yuishinkai Student Guide

## Buying and Washing A Gi

You may have already invested in a gi (martial arts uniform). Our club tends to go for the thicker gi. You'll be rolling and sweating into your gi so it helps that it's substantial and it soaks up or wicks sweat away from the skin. However, the lighter karate-style uniforms are also popular within the club. It comes down to personal preference. If you have a gi from elsewhere, please have a chat to one of the instructors about whether it is suitable for the club. They usually are. Oh... and we do have club patches available at the dojo to purchase to complete your ensemble!!



If you don't have a gi, the club has negotiated a 15-20% discount with RMR martial arts supplies, who are located near Garden City Shopping Centre (not in it) at Mt Gravatt. See one of the club admin people for location details, and a discount card.

Rebecca at RMR has a great eye for determining your size and takes shrinkage into account (gi's shrink with the first couple of washes). If you don't work out your size with her in the store, and do your trying on at home and find it's the wrong size, DON'T wash it before you return it for exchange. It will look and feel used and she WON'T be able to replace it for you, because she obviously can't sell it as new.

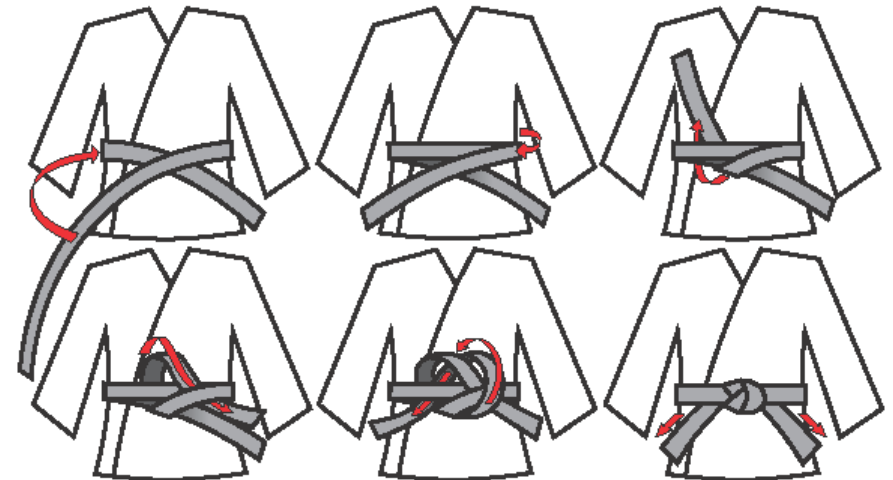
So if you're happy with the size, she advises that if you don't want the gi to shrink too much, you should cold wash it the first couple of times. If it's slightly too big and you want more shrinkage then hot wash it the first two times and machine dry it.

You'll want to look after your gi generally, so there's some things you should know. It needs to be regularly washed, of course. Don't put the belt in with the gi. It will go quite limp and it's just not necessary to wash.

If you don't sweat much, you may get away with washing your gi every couple of training sessions, if you dry it in between. Some of our club members simply put their gi in the washing machine when they get home after each training session. Others have two or more gi's which they alternate to give each a proper chance to dry. Please don't ever leave your gi in your bag, as sweat infused damp fabric will quickly develop mould which will be very hard to get rid of and dry cleaning won't get rid of the mould stains. Obviously, your gi will last longer if it's looked after. An occasional pre-wash soak in a bleach like napsan will continue to keep it white (they can start to look a creamy colour when they get old). It will also stay much whiter much longer if you hang it in the shade or hang it inside-out when drying it in the sun.

The fabric is quite strong, but will wear with time, especially around the knees and neck. It is expected that apart from keeping your gi clean, that it is maintained in good repair, so any little rips and tears should be mended straight away. They tend to just get larger if not attended to which means more mending, and who wants that.

## How To Tie The Aikido Belt



1. Start with one end hanging at the left leg.
2. Wrap the belt around the waist twice. Try to get both ends even.
3. Tuck the right hand end up behind the two layers of belt.
4. Bring the right-hand end up and over and *between* the two layers of belt, sitting higher than the other end, and making a loop.
5. Bring the left-hand end up. Keep going with the left-hand end, go over and down, through the loop you just made, and *between* the two layers of belt going around the waist.
6. Flatten the knot, pulling both ends of the belt to tighten it.

## A Final Note...

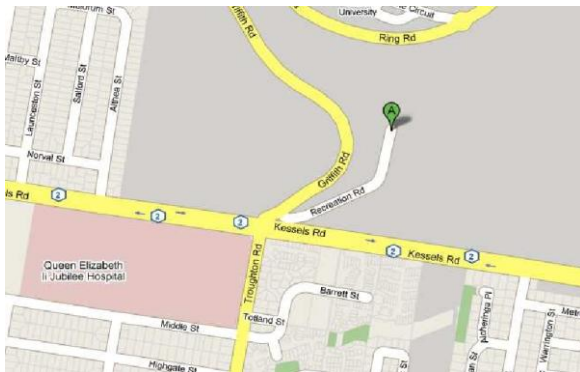
Enjoy being a beginner. Maintain that sense of always wanting to learn more. Remember that those achieving black belt also consider themselves to be beginners. Black belt signifies to them that they have acquired some basics and their training is about to begin!!! And don't think that's too far away. With regular training, you could be a black belt and teaching beginners yourself in 3 years time. Your journey with aikido is just beginning!! Best wishes.

## Class Times & Locations

Monthly training fees cover unlimited training at Nathan. Everton Hills is a PCYC, and has a different fee structure (please enquire). For up-to-date class times, please visit the Griffith Aikido website at <http://griffithaikido.com>, or ring 0410 260 003.

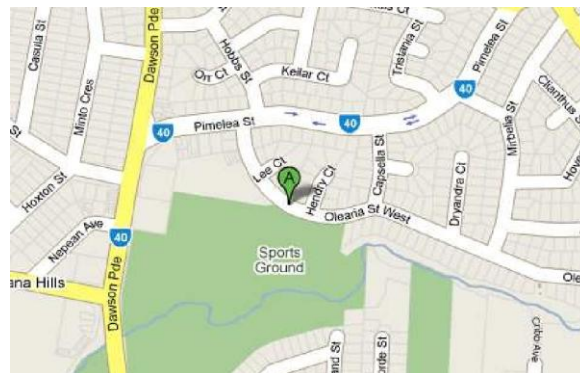
### Nathan dojo (main) - Griffith University Nathan campus

A. Sports centre (N36), Recreation Rd., Nathan Campus, Griffith University



### Everton Hills dojo

A. The Hills District PCYC, 135a Olearia St West, Everton Hills.



### Griffith Aikido Contact Details

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