

## Self-Defense Gadgets

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### Do I really need a self-defense gadget to be safe?

Developing a street sense and paying attention to your surroundings are perhaps your best strategies to avoid attack. Still, self-defense gadgets might temporarily incapacitate or disorient an attacker and give you a few extra moments to try to escape.

The legality of these devices varies widely by jurisdiction, especially with stun guns and TASERS. Merely possessing one of these may be a criminal offense in some cities and states. It's wise to call local law enforcement to determine legality of any self-defense product. Not surprisingly, some gadgets of this type are restricted on commercial airline flights. Visit [www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm](http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm) for more information.

### What kinds of non-lethal self-defense gadgets are available?

- **Defensive sprays** come in small canisters that are aimed at an attacker's face. The sprays irritate or inflame eyes and airways, causing great discomfort. Some also add dye which can help police identify a suspect. They can reach targets up to roughly 10 feet away, which is certainly a benefit. Most are designed to spray in a narrow stream, but some models that spray in a more diffuse cone pattern (like air freshener). If you're worried about missing the target under fire, a cone pattern requires less precise aiming.
  - **Pepper spray** (sometimes called oleoresin capsicum, or **OC spray**), is the most common defensive spray



Pepper spray is available in small canisters which attach to a keychain for ready access.

on the market. Its inflammatory effects cause almost immediate involuntary closing of the eyes, difficulty breathing, coughing and other symptoms of great discomfort. Intense effects last about 45 minutes, though residual inflammation may continue for a few hours.

- Other less common options include the irritant sprays orthochlorobenzalmalonitrile (CS) – a form of tear gas, and alphachloroacetaphenone (CN) – marketed under the brand name Mace®. Each of these two products have been around for decades but have been largely supplanted by OC. Reportedly, one can build up a tolerance for CS and CN sprays, which puts them at a disadvantage compared to the more popular OC spray.
- **Electroshock devices** use a high-voltage (but low-amperage) electric shock to temporarily disable an attacker. Electricity moves through the shocked person's body between two electrodes. In Illinois, current law treats the sale of electroshock devices in a similar manner to firearms. Purchasers must have a Firearm Owner Identification (FOID) card and submit to a background check.
  - **Stun guns** are simple devices which must touch the attacker to work. Obviously, this requires you to be close to your attacker, which is not ideal. Fortunately, they will stun through clothing, including coats. These devices vary chiefly by the voltage they deliver. The higher the voltage, the shorter the amount of time the stun gun must be held in contact with the attacker's body. Powerful stun guns require contact of one or two seconds, and lower voltage models may require five or more seconds.
  - **TASERs** are manufactured by TASER International, and differ from traditional stun guns in that they can be used from a distance.



The TASER C-2 electroshock device is designed for the general public.

A consumer model known as the TASER C2 will fire two electrodes via compressed gas into an attacker at a distance of 15 feet. Interestingly, when the device is fired, the immediate area is sprinkled with confetti containing an ID number assigned to you. This permits law enforcement officers to determine which exact TASER unit was used in the incident.



- **Noisemaking gadgets** attract attention and help to summon assistance from passers-by.

- A **whistle** is an inexpensive and reliable noisemaker. Some college campuses offer free whistles (sometimes informally called “rape whistles”) to students and staff [www.americanwhistle.com/colleges.html](http://www.americanwhistle.com/colleges.html).)

Don't forget a whistle as a way to attract attention during an attack.

- **Keychain alarm** devices emit a piercing sound (often 115 decibels or louder.) They are similar in size and appearance to a remote control keyfob for your car's doors. Some add a small flashlight too.
- **Tactical flashlights** are used by law enforcement agents to temporarily blind and disorient aggressors. These effects carry over to the self-defense market as well. Not all flashlights are suitable. You need to find a **very** bright flashlight that is small enough that you'll carry it with you regularly, otherwise it won't be handy when trouble strikes. Brightness is often measured in lumens. Anything over 50 lumens will suffice, as many inexpensive household flashlights only output 10 or less lumens.



The Streamlight TL-3 tactical flashlight

A flashlight which uses two or three lithium CR123A batteries is likely to be compact, but potent. Consider, for instance, the Streamlight TL-3 (Internet Price \$50-\$65) which gives off an impressive 211 lumens, despite being only 6" long. Spending more than \$20 on a flashlight may seem extravagant, but tactical flashlights like this are built to last.

### **Should I consider a firearm for protection instead of a gadget?**

Some people purchase firearms for self-defense, but guns are outside the scope of this brochure. If you are considering a firearm, safety and training are critical. The National Rifle Association's (NRA) network of instructors offer a wide variety of courses, including those focusing on personal protection. Learn more at [nrahq.org/education/training/index.asp](http://nrahq.org/education/training/index.asp).

### **Conclusion**

A carefully chosen gadget, especially when purchased in conjunction with professional self-defense training, can give you added confidence and make it more likely that you avoid attack or escape unharmed. Attracting attention with a noisemaking device, temporarily blinding an assailant with a flashlight or defensive spray or rendering your attacker immobile with an electronic shock device may help improve your odds of escape or survival in case you are assaulted or threatened.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, you can visit me at the Reference Desk, contact me via email ([moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info](mailto:moetting@hinsdalelibrary.info)), or call me at 630-986-1976 ext. 225.

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