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Treatmonk's Guide to Monks



Colour Coding the Guide:

In this guide I will be Colour Coding your various options and abilities to provide my opinion on each of them.

Red: Warning. This is a poor option and should be avoided, or it is a class ability that isn't going to do much for you

Orange: This is an OK option. I'm not recommending it, but it's not bad, as a class ability it's very circumstantial or very so-so

Green: I recommend this option. It is a strong choice or a decent ability

Blue: A must have. Your best possible option, the abilities that make you go "WOW!"

Easy enough? Let's begin:

Introduction:

While I write this, there are two threads raging in the Paizo boards regarding the weakness of Monks. I am disheartened for two reasons, firstly, those who are decrying the power of Monks claim that the Monk can't do damage, and is so-so at combat maneuvers and therefore doesn't effectively contribute to combat like they should. The second reason I'm disheartened is that those defending Monks claim that they don't need to do damage or be effective at combat maneuvers, and in fact, their job is to pile on defense, run around combat, and (hopefully) draw the attacks of the enemy, and who knows, maybe they'll get a lucky roll on a trip?

Ugh.

The point that those decrying Monks make is valid, and is the reason I think a guide is needed. Monks have some problems, and the worst problem they have is bad advertising. Someone, long ago, sold the idea that Monks have Wisdom as a primary stat, but in addition to that, they need Dex and Con, and that damage would be the result of a growing unarmed combat base damage and large number of attacks through flurry of blows. Wherever in your brain that this information is stored and guarded - it's now time to dump it. Purge it entirely, and let's look at the Monk without these pre-

conceived notions, and see what we can do to make it work the way it should.

Here's the key: Monks have a damage problem. Monks have a Combat Maneuvers problem. The problem is that they should be good at both these things, and Monks in droves just aren't because of bad prioritization. Therefore, what we have to do is consider this problem with every decision we make. Every time we make a decision it will be with the following question in the back of our heads, "How does this choice help the damage and/or combat maneuver problem?" This will give us the most towards solving the problem.

Then, once we do that, we see if our ending result has solved the problem, whether new problems have arisen, and whether the end result is a contributing character.

The Concentrations:

The Unarmed Monk:

Your Monk may choose to use unarmed combat. This isn't a build per say, because draw a couple weapons and you just became an armed Monk. Unarmed and armed Monks aren't built any differently - the difference is which weapon happens to be superior at this moment.

Pros:

Makes it really easy to use shuriken as needed
Deflect arrows also is easier
Take advantage of advancing damage

Cons:

Defeating DR can be difficult
Amulet of Mighty Fists is terribly expensive and takes up the amulet slot

Hints:

Carry weapons anyways (flurry friendly). Specifically Cold Iron, Silver, and when you can afford it, Adamantium (at 16th level you can sell them). This gives you a secondary option vs these DR's. Make sure to take Quick Draw, so when you find out the monster has a specific type of DR you can pull the appropriate weapons instantly.

The Armed Monk:

The Armed Monk uses either a Quarterstaff, Kamas, Nunchaku or Sai in combat. All Monks should have weapons available for when things like DR become a problem. You will find to-hit with weapons is often better than unarmed (since enchantments are cheaper and masterwork is available)

Pros:

Weapon enchantment is just superior in price to amulet of mighty fists (though you may want the amulet anyways)
Special material weapons can be held for DR defeating

Cons:

Damage is static
you don't benefit from the Ki powers that make your unarmed strikes hit as magic/
lawful/adamantium with your primary weapon
you may not have a hands free for throwing shuriken

Hints: keep your hands free to throw shuriken, then use quick draw to draw the appropriate weapons when you get into melee when that is your best option. This can allow you to at least benefit a bit from feats like deflect arrow, and gives you the versatility of the Shuriken

Ranged Combat:

Good for Monks - no, really.

Shuriken used normally are a poor ranged weapon. The base damage is insignificant, the range isn't good, there's no great critical multiplier, the only real advantage is they can be drawn as a free action.

However, in the hands of a Monk, Shuriken can be thrown using Flurry of Blows. One of the greatest disadvantages of the Monk is that you need to full attack to get the advantage of flurry, but with Shuriken, that doesn't necessarily require you to get into melee range. A Monk can throw 2 shuriken per round at first level, adding Str bonus to each.

As levels increase, you have a choice to make. You can invest some feats and make sure this type of combat remains viable, or you can ignore it and let it fade into a poor option. I recommend giving it a try at low levels, and if you like the versatility, pick up Deadly Aim at least.

Ability Scores:

Monks are all kinds of MAD (multiple ability dependant), AC is dependant on Dex and Wis, Stunning fist on Wis, HP on Con, Damage on Str, Combat Maneuvers on Str, Skills on Int...really, only CHA is a true "dump stat"

However, in the back of our brains, remember the question? ("How does this choice help the damage and/or combat maneuver problem?") So, based on that question, we can determine our primary ability score - at that ability score is Str.

Therefore, when you set your ability scores, they should be **Str** > **Wis** > **Dex** > **Con** > **Int** > **Cha**

Here's some examples, and for the examples we'll assume a +2 variable stat bonus (applied to Str):

10 point buy: (or, "Your DM hates you")

Str: 17 (7) **Dex:** 12 (2) **Con:** 12 (2) **Int:** 8 (-2) **Wis:** 14 (5) **Cha:** 7 (-4)

(Obviously, your level 4 increase should be put into Strength - after that, you have some flexibility)

15 point buy:

Str: 18 (10) **Dex:** 13 (3) **Con:** 13 (3) **Int:** 8 (-2) **Wis:** 14 (5) **Cha:** 7 (-4)

(Since you began with an 18 Str, you can afford a Dex and Con increase at levels 4 and 8)

20 point buy:

Str: 19 (13) **Dex:** 14 (5) **Con:** 13 (3) **Int:** 8 (-2) **Wis:** 14 (5) **Cha:** 7 (-4)

(Your initial Ability increase should go to Str, Con is an obvious 8th level choice)

25 point buy: (or, "Why is your DM smiling?")

Str: 19 (13) **Dex:** 14 (5) **Con:** 13 (3) **Int:** 8 (-2) **Wis:** 16 (10) **Cha:** 7 (-4)
(Your initial ability increase should go to Str, Con is an obvious 8th level choice)

Races:

Once again, remember our question. ("**How does this choice help the damage and/or combat maneuver problem?**")

When we remember the question, we can immediately weed out the poor choices (Gnome and Halfling). The other Races should be considered individually:

Dwarf: A very strong choice for Monk. Although you do not have a Str bonus, the Wis and Con bonus free up points to ensure you start with a minimum of 17 Strength. The Monk movement speed is a nice feature for the slower dwarf, and darkvision is always a nice to have. The bonus to saves is always a nice feature as well. Other racial features may not come up too much, but overall, this is a pretty good package for the class.

Human: This always seems to be an excellent option and for Monks there is no exception. With a lower Int you can expect to be skill-hungry, and more feats is always welcome. The +2 Stat bonus means a Str bonus, which is very good to have as well. One warning I will make - you will find that having 2 feats at level 1 isn't as good as you might hope because so many of the decent Monk feats require a minimum +1 BAB.

Half-Orc: This is a significant step down from Human, but still decent. The +2 Str bonus is useful, and the Ferocity ability is a decent feature to have (Use the standard action as a "Wholeness of Body" action). Darkvision is always nice to have as well.

Half-Elf: We are in very so-so territory. The +2 stat bonus can be put into Str, and you get low-light vision, but that's really all you are getting here. The multiclass bonus is wasted on you, and the Skill Focus feat is OK, but not a feat you normally would have taken.

The Others: We are in very sub-optimal territory here. We are looking at painful stat penalties, stat bonuses in the wrong place, small size, racial abilities that don't benefit Monks, and all kinds of things that make these choices your poorest choices overall.

Favored Class Bonus:

You would certainly benefit from an extra skill point, but this is a non-armored front-line fighter with medium Hit Die. **I recommend the Hit Point at every level.**

Skills:

Without a great Int, and a base 4 Skill Points/level, you won't be looking at a huge range of skills, however, you do have a nice skill list to choose from....

Acrobatics: The absolute must-have. Being able to tumble is important to melee tactics, and you are a melee character. Furthermore, you don't have armor check penalties to worry about. Finally, how could any Monk look at himself in the mirror without this skill?

Perception: The most used skill in the game. It is a class skill based off a Stat you have a decent score in. Again, this is a must-have.

Stealth: You probably have a decent Dex, you have no armor check penalty, and this is a useful skill. Recommended, but not a must-have.

Sense Motive: A social character you are not, but as an observer, you can provide contribution to the social interaction with this skill. It's based off of Wisdom, which is nice as well.

Climb: It's based off your primary stat, which is helpful, you also avoid armor check penalties, and climbing is an appropriate thing for Monks to do. Probably obsolete at high level, but at lower levels, somewhat useful.

Knowledge (Religion): Int is not a strong ability for you, but this is one of the most useful knowledges in the game. Knowledge (Religion) is used to identify Undead, which is going to be useful in most campaigns, also, it is fitting for a Monk don't you think?

Escape Artist: Not as good as you might think. In most cases, you are probably just as well to use your regular grapple check to escape a grapple, so it's really just about getting out of ropes or bindings, which I won't say never comes up, but it doesn't come

up very often. There is a reasonable chance you will never use this in a campaign.

Class Abilities:

AC Bonus: The ultimate double-edged sword and one of the most defining features of the Monk. You get Wisdom as a bonus to AC and CMD, but you can't wear armor. The bonus increases at 4th level and every 4 levels after that (to a +5 at level 20). This means that Wisdom-bonus headgear becomes imperative to gain the full effects of this bonus. One nice point to mention is that the AC bonus applies to your AC when flat-footed, against touch-attacks - you name it, which in at least some ways makes it better than armor.

Flurry of Blows: This works like two weapon fighting except that you don't need the feats (and it doesn't stack - so don't bother getting them) and that your full Str bonus applies to all attacks (which makes Str all the more important), in addition, your weapon list is quite limited for use with this ability. The main feature here is that Flurry of Blows works off a full BAB base, which means that when you attack, you always, always want to avoid the 3/4 BAB. Flurry allows you to do this. This really is the primary selling feature of the Monk, a TWF that hits hard with every attack, no flank required.

Unarmed Strike: You gain the Improved Unarmed Strike feat, in addition your unarmed attacks increase in damage as you gain levels.

Weapon or Unarmed: As a Monk you can choose to use a weapon with flurry of blows (from a limited list) or fight unarmed. The advantage of fighting unarmed is that

your damage increases with your level, while a melee weapon does static damage. The advantages of fighting with a weapon are that you can enchant it (which saves you the crazy-cost of an amulet of mighty fists and saves the amulet slot as well) and you can buy different "materials" (Cold-iron, adamantium, silver) which help you bypass DR, and at low levels, Masterwork is an option. In any case, I recommend having special material weapons available when needed, but whether your "primary" weapon is your fist or an actual weapon, expect to use both. With the cost of Amulet of Mighty Fists expect magic weapons to come first, but any monk can expect to fight unarmed for Stunning Fist and Medusa's Wrath at a minimum.

Bonus Feats: You gain a bonus feat at 1st, 2nd, 6th and every 4 levels thereafter. This is pretty nice as there is a definite "front-load" here which means the Monk is getting a pretty big bonus from this ability very soon. I will have a "Feats" section later in the guide - this is specifically for the Bonus Feat options. Take note that prerequisites for these feats are ignored. Compare: At level 10 a fighter has gotten 6 bonus feats, a Monk has gotten 4...not bad.

Available at 1st level:

Catch Off Guard: Improvised Melee Weapons can not be used with Flurry of Blows. Always attack with Flurry of Blows. Always.

Combat Reflexes: Provides extra attacks of opportunity (based off of Dex), but since you won't be using Reach weapons, don't expect lots of opportunity attacks to be provoked.

Deflect Arrows: A nice simple defense. Avoid one ranged attack per round. Note that you must have a hand free.

Dodge: +1 AC. Simple but nice to have.

Improved Grapple: If you are going to use Combat Maneuvers - this is the one you want. Grapple is one of the only CM where you can take the "Greater" version without Combat Expertise (which you don't want, and wouldn't qualify for even if you did), so this is a primary option.

Scorpion Style: This ability has the same chance of working as Stunning Fist, but unlike Stunning Fist it can't be used as a part of a Full Attack, which means you aren't attacking with Flurry of Blows, and if you can't use flurry, then it just blows.

Throw Anything: You can use an improvised ranged weapon. The only advantage I could see here is for a Melee Weapon Monk using this feat so they can throw their weapon, but do they still get flurry of blows? I'm not sure they do, so then this isn't so great. The other possible use is to use it with Snatch Arrows (to throw back the arrow), but that isn't a viable option until after 10th level, and deadly aim is going to be a required feat for it to be effective at all.

Available at 6th level:

Gorgon's Fist: You were smart enough to skip Scorpion Style which means you don't get much synergy for this ability. Besides, it suffers from the same drawback as Scorpion Style. If you wish to cause a status effect to your target, I recommend Stunning them.

Improved Bull Rush: As with Grapple, this is a good option for Monks because they can take the "Greater" version. You have to get Power Attack, but that's really not a penalty at all is it? Bull Rushing isn't fantastic, but once the bull rush victim provokes attacks of opportunity by being pushed, then tactical options abound.

Improved Disarm: You can't get the "Greater" version, which means this is OK, but sub-optimal compared to Grapple or Bull Rush.

Improved Feint: I'm not sure what the draw would be for a Monk with Feint. For a Rogue sure, but unless you are fighting something with an amazing Dex modifier, I would think a straight out attack is normally your better option.

Improved Trip: Sorry wannabe "Trip Monkey". Again, the greater version is not

available for you, so this becomes an inferior option to grappling or bull rushing. Overrunning can make the enemy prone too - so you do have options. That said, you can use Trip as part of a flurry - and that's significant, so this is still not a bad idea to pick up.

Mobility: Get a +4 AC vs. attacks of opportunity caused by your movement. Really, you shouldn't be provoking too many since you have a good acrobatics score, but possibly occasionally handy, especially when you fail that acrobatics check.

Available at 10th level:

Improved Critical: There aren't any "flurry" applicable weapons which get great critical ranges or multipliers, however, this is still a decent feat to have. Less optimal for you than some, but as a freebie, certainly decent.

Medusa's Wrath: It's very nice to be able to get this ability without having to take the poor prerequisites. Unlike its predecessors, this feat is not only going to be used with Flurry of Blows, it will make your Flurry of Blows better. Use Stunning Fist to set them up, then Medusa's Wrath to drop them down. If you are an armed Monk - no problem, just kick.

Snatch Arrows: I'm not sure this is all that much better than deflect arrows. Yes, you can throw the weapon back (if it is a thrown weapon) but you are doing so at a reduced BAB (since you aren't using flurry).

Spring Attack: You can move both before and after a single melee attack. You got the last part of that sentence right? Guess why you don't want this? If you are in a position where you wish you had spring attack, reach in your pocket, grab the Shuriken there, and throw them.

Stunning Fist: The primary advantage of this ability (1/day per level) is that there is no risk in using it. You declare using it before the attack roll, but it can be used as part of a flurry attack, and it doesn't negate the damage of the attack, so if it doesn't work, you aren't reducing your normal offense by any means. However, when it sticks, it's a great bonus. As your levels increase you can choose to cause different status effects (the primary advantage of which is longer durations). In general, if in doubt, Stunning for a round is always a good option.

Evasion: Use that good Reflex save to avoid all the damage from a spell that would normally have a partial effect for those who make their saves. The most common use is dodging Fireballs and the like. A good way to avoid HP loss.

Fast Movement: In combat you want to be using Full Attacks so you can Flurry. However, an increased speed is very helpful to get you into a good position, catch a running foe, set up a combat maneuver, and the like. Not the defining ability some make it out to be, but nice to have nonetheless.

Maneuver Training: You get to use your Monk level in place of your BAB for determining your CMB. So you use full BAB when attacking (with flurry of blows) or using Combat Maneuvers (with Maneuver Training), so where it counts, the Monk is a full BAB class. Once this is in effect, any time you only have a standard action to attack, consider a Combat Maneuver instead of a regular attack.

Still Mind: A +2 to save vs. Enchantment Spells and effects. Not an everyday occurrence, but considering how screwed you are when you fail such a save, this bonus is still nice to have.

Ki Pool: Your Ki pool is useful for lots of things, but most notably it grants you a number of abilities:

Save one Ki point in your pool to have your unarmed attacks treated as magic, lawful and eventually Adamantine. The latter comes late in the game, the former is easily gained through other means, and how many creatures have DR /Lawful. Not really worth saving the Ki for IMO.

Get one extra attack: One extra attack at full BAB? Remember the question to always remember? This is a significant (albeit short term) offensive boost.

Increase speed by 20 for one round: Glad to have it as an option, but it's not something you'll need often.

+4 Dodge bonus to AC for one round: Provides an AC patch, which like the extra attack, aids your combat statistics. However, between the two, take the attack 90% of the time.

Slow Fall: Horribly circumstantial, but not totally useless.

High Jump: When you get this ability you can be a pretty great jumper, even better when you spend Ki. This isn't going to be a replacement for fly, because if you're jumping you aren't using Flurry. However, a jump/grapple could be invaluable in some situations.

Purity of Body: Immune to disease. Pretty self-explanatory. Diseases don't come up all that often, but occasionally they do.

Wholeness of Body: Since you can't cast, having a healing option is nice. Unfortunately, this isn't a very efficient one. The cost is high (2 Ki points), it uses a standard action, and it heals one HP per level (self only). Not earth shattering, but better than nothing. Especially if you are a Half Orc and your Ferocity just kicked in.

Improved Evasion: A guilty pleasure. Normally you should expect to save vs. Reflex targeting spells, and even if you don't, generally Blasting at this level isn't all that effective. However, I admit I always feel better having this, because then there is a great deal less riding on that saving throw, which is always nice.

Diamond Body: Unlike Diseases, poisons come up all the time. Even more so at high levels (all kinds of outsiders have natural poison attacks). Excellent ability to have.

Abundant Step: for the cost of 2 Ki points, the Monk can Dimension Door as the spell except it only requires a Move action. This is going to be a very handy ability. Dimension door is a great spell even when it takes a standard action.

Quivering Palm: Not nearly as fantastic as its reputation, but still solid. The Mechanics of Quivering Palm are very similar to Stunning Fist, which means the attack roll must hit, and the victim must fail a Fort save. Should both those requirements be met, you win (as long as the target qualifies: IE: not immune to crits). The "wait until later" option to activate the ability is certainly fitting for the flavor (Kill Bill comes to mind), but I would think the opportune time to activate this ability is almost always going to be, "RIGHT NOW!!!"

Timeless Body: Only really going to be useful in a LONG campaign or one that specifically makes use of the aging rules. I think in most campaigns, this isn't really going to be a factor. If it does come up, it would be nice to get the Wis bonus without losing physical stats...

Tongue of the Sun and Moon: Speak with any living creature. At level 17, this is a pretty minor ability.

Empty Body: At 19th level you can go ethereal. Certainly useful, but this is a very late in the game ability, most campaigns don't ever get to 19th level.

Perfect Self: The capstone ability for Monks. Expect this to come into play when play is nearly over, if it comes up at all. That said, it's not that awesome an ability anyways.

Feats:

Deadly Aim: Monk's have one ranged weapon option, and that's the Shuriken. With a high Strength, Flurry of Blows, and Deadly Aim, you can get huge amounts of Shuriken in the air, and each one will do decent damage.

Defensive Combat Training: Your CMD uses your Monk level, but your CMD does not, although it is boosted by your Wisdom modifier and a progressing bonus, this feat applied to your CMD makes you truly a difficult target.

Extra Ki: 2 extra points of Ki. With $1/2$ your level + Wis modifier in Ki points, 2 more is likely not a huge increase. Decent, but not fantastic.

Improved Initiative: Always useful for any character, for a Monk, it can mean being able to cross the battlefield and grapple the Wizard before he casts.

Greater Grapple: Maintain your grapple as a move action, allowing you to heal, attack, etc.

Great Fortitude: You have 3 good saves, and you have special bonuses for dealing with Ref saves (evasion, improved evasion) and Will saves (Still mind) but not fort saves.

Improved Great Fortitude: Gives you a second saving throw on fortitude saves, now you've got a pretty nasty set of saving throws.

Lunge: Since none of your weapons have reach, this gives you some versatility in that regard

Nimble Moves: Allows you to ignore 5 feet of difficult terrain, allowing helpful things like 5-foot steps

Point Blank Shot: Only for increasing focus on Shuriken, and then, mainly as a prerequisite

Far Shot: If you are planning to use lots of Shuriken, you will find the range increments limiting, but this feat will reduce the pain.

Power Attack: Remember the question? Welcome to the answer. Monks have no off-hand attacks as per their description, so that should be a -1/+2 trade on all attacks.

Greater Bull Rush: Push enemies and they provoke attacks of opportunity by the movement. If you roll well, push them into other enemies who in turn are pushed, also provoking attacks of opportunity.

Improved Overrun: Instead of trip, consider using an overrun to knock your enemies prone

Greater Overrun: Here's why you should overrun instead of trip. Have the enemy being knocked prone provoke attacks of opportunity.

Quick Draw: The best way to get those Cold Iron Sai out when you need them.

Step Up: Tactically a very strong feat, allowing you to remain adjacent to casters, archers, etc.

Toughness: More HP, always good to have.

Weapon Focus: +1 to hit with your primary weapon, not a big bonus, but when you are making LOTS of attacks, a +1 to hit adds up over time.

Equipment:

Weapons:

Shuriken: Drawn as a free action, Str bonus to damage, Uses Flurry of blows....not much not to like here, especially with Deadly Aim. Make sure you get some special material shuriken, because they won't be great at punching through DR by damage alone. The great thing about Shuriken is they are giving you a way to full attack when not adjacent to a foe.

Melee: Mechanically, the options are pretty similar, for the most part you are looking at 1d6 damage with x2 crit. Sai do slightly less damage than the other options. Even an unarmed Monk needs melee weapons, primarily to have cold iron, silver, and adamantium weapon options.

Wands:

Here is the deal with wands: No, you can't use them, however, your party Wizard, Druid, Sorcerer, Cleric, Bard, Ranger or Paladin (and probably the rogue too) can use select wands, and they all have limits to spells per day they can cast, what spells they know or can have memorized at any time, or the amount of resources they want to use in buffing the party Monk. Providing them with the tools that they can use to buff you (outside of combat) is the least you can do. Getting Mage armor from the party Wizard on a regular basis is an investment on his part. Handing him a wand and asking him to use one charge to give you mage armor costs him nothing. Therefore, I suggest picking up the following wands:

Mage Armor: Pretty much a must for Monks. This is a CHEAP wand, with 1 hour duration per use. This is a fantastic deal for you. Somebody in your party can use this wand, give it to them and have them use it on you out of combat.

Barkskin: If you are using your amulet slot for an amulet of mighty fists, then you aren't using it on an amulet of natural armor. Therefore this is a good wand to get. Druids and Rangers (and those with Use Magic Device) can all use this wand. As your levels increase (and therefore your wallet) you can afford increasingly higher caster level versions of this wand. The 12th level caster level Barkskin wand would cost 18,000 and provide +5 Natural armor for 2 hours per use (a fraction of the cost of the +5 amulet).

Protection from Evil: A super cheap wand that provides a +2 deflection, protection from summoned evil critters, and protection against mind control. The duration won't be long (one minute) so this is a "right before we go through the door" kind of spell. Probably only something you will use often at lower levels. If you are in an evil

campaign, then protection from good is a better choice.

Enlarge person: Also a one minute duration. Enlarge Person is a really nice enhancement for Monks. Str increases, your base damage improves, and you get that all important 10' natural reach.

Magic Weapon or Magic Fang: For an unarmed Monk this provides a quick and easy +1 enhancement to fists that is much cheaper than an amulet of mighty fists (use the amulet of mighty fists anyways, but get other effects besides enhancement)

Rings:

Protection: For obvious reasons. Pretty much every class gets use from this ring, Monks included.

Freedom of Movement: Not something to aspire to early in your career, but later on, this is a godsend.

Wondrous items:

Amulet of Mighty Fists: A stupidly expensive item, nevertheless a must for unarmed Monks and a pretty important item even for armed Monks (assuming you use Stunning Fist and Medusa's Wrath). One thing to note regarding this item is that unlike weapons, it does not need a minimum +1 enchantment to gain other weapon properties. Holy is the obvious go-to enchantment to get, as DR /good is common with evil outsiders. Damage enhancers (remember our question) of any kind are going to be good though. Besides, the imagery of shocking or flaming fists is pretty cool too. If you are unable to get Greater Magic Fang or Greater Magic Weapon cast on you regularly, then the enhancement bonus is needed for the + to hit as well as damage. Go with Holy + whatever enhancement bonus you can afford.

Amulet of Natural Armor: I'm going to suggest the Amulet of Mighty fists pretty much universally over this item. Worth having if you don't have the coveted amulet of mighty fists yet, but once you get it, time to switch, even if you are an armed Monk.

Cloak of Resistance: Your best cloak slot, pretty much always. Improve the resistance bonus as you can afford to.

Goggles of Night: If you don't have darkvision naturally, then these are a good investment.

Eyes of the Eagle: If you do have Darkvision naturally, I would get these for the goggle slot.

Belt of Giant Strength/Physical Might: Getting the enhancement bonus belts is a great idea, getting Str bonus is your highest priority (remember the question), but enhancing all 3 physical stats is of great benefit when it can be afforded.

Boots of Speed: Your first choice for Boots. Get haste when you need it. Haste improves speed, attacks, and defense (stackable).

Boots of Levitation: Your second choice for boots. Levitate is not as good as flying, but if you don't have a fly option, this is an OK fallback, and the 7,500 gp price tag means it's going to be cheaper than most flying options, which means you can get it earlier.

Slippers of Spider Climbing: Before the more expensive boots, these slippers are very handy at a good price.

Bracers of Armor: Generally I like Mage Armor better (the wand is cheap) for up to +4, but these items eventually allow a +8 armor bonus, which dwarfs mage armor, meaning eventually these become your primary glove slot item.

Carpet of flying: Your eventual must have flight item. Usable all day every day. There are lots of other flying options available which are decent options too (Wings of flying, broom of flying, cloak of the Bat, etc.) make sure you eventually get one.

Headband of inspired Wisdom: Your go-to head slot. Gaining enhancement bonuses to Int or Cha are not really required (unless you want the extra skill/s enough to pay the price to enhance both ability scores). Wisdom grants obvious advantages to the Monk.

Monk's Robe: Your best robe slot item. AC is treated as a Monk 5 levels higher (so at least +1, sometimes +2), your unarmed combat is treated as a Monk 5 levels higher (so at least a one step increase, sometimes two steps), and you get an extra use of stunning fist every day.

Permanency Spell:

If spellcasting can be bought in your campaign, getting Greater Magic Fang cast with Permanency can be a huge boon to a Monk, and save you money too. If such spellcasting is not available, at higher levels you may be able to get your party Wizard or Sorcerer to cast it, if you provide them with the material cost (and scroll if necessary)

Greater Magic Fang on unarmed: This is huge - so get it if you can. It means you can use that Amulet of Mighty Fists (which doesn't need a +1 minimum enhancement) to use exclusively on other enchantments.

Cost: 7500 gp material cost per casting, 3000 gp scroll cost (permanency) plus the cost of getting greater magic fang cast (as high caster level as possible).

In Conclusion:

We determined a problem with Monks, and looked for ways to solve the problem by constantly considering this question:

"How does this choice help the damage and/or combat maneuver problem?"

Did it we do that? Yes, in each area we considered that. By doing so, we ensured our Strength was high from beginning to end, we chose feats that would increase our damage (like Power attack) and concentrated on Combat Maneuvers we could take a "Greater" version of (like Grapple).

Offensive conclusions:

So what's our 1st level Monk going to look like offensively? Well, he'll be attack 2x round, with probably a +3/+3 for 1d6+4 (all from the likely +4 Str bonus). Not bad. Potentially 20 damage/round. Our ranged will likely be +1/+1 for 1d2+4, which gives us an option if otherwise flurry of blows would be unavailable. Look for a Starting grapple score of +7...which is very respectable at 1st level.

At 8th level he'll be attacking 4 times/round at base +6/+6/+1/+1 (likely -3 from power attack, +5 for Str, a +1 from masterwork or enhancement, potentially Weapon

Focus - total probably around +4). Power attack + Str bonus will mean likely a +11 damage bonus per hit by those two sources alone (that's a potential 44 damage per round just from Str and Power attack). At this level, the armed Monk is really going to shine more than the unarmed Monk, so pick up a couple enchanted Kamas and go to town. Look for a grapple score of around +17 at this level, still very respectable...

At 16th level you may find unarmed to be a superior offensive option (especially with a Monk's Robe - which you should probably have at this point). 7 Base attacks per round will likely be 9 quite often with Ki and boots of Speed. 2d10 base unarmed damage, how about +18 bonus damage per hit from power attack and Str alone? Likely a +2 to +4 enhancement bonus and a holy weapon bonus. I would expect damage potential to be several hundred per round (though the details largely depend on your feat/magic item choices). Overrun or Bull Rush will likely be an option in addition to grapple for Combat maneuvers. Use the former when a standard action attack is the only option (like when you move and attack).

How about Defensively?

Our AC at first level isn't going to be great unless we get a hand from the party wizard or sorcerer - if you can't, then toughness is probably a good 1st level investment. Expect an AC of around 13, or 17 with the help of a wizard.

At level 8 you should be looking at an AC in the 24 range. Not fantastic, but not bad.

At level 16 your AC should be in the 35 range. Again, not amazing, but enough to keep being hit automatically, and make power attacking you risky.

Of course, with a Ki investment, you can pump up those numbers somewhat.

What about Saving Throws? Well, we expect of course no weak points in Saving throws, and this is doubly true if my feat recommendations of Great fort/Imp Great Fort are taken.

At first level: Look at about +3 for all saves. Decent.

At level 8 expect your Ref to be around +9 with Evasion to pump it up. Your Fort should be around +10, and your Will should be around +10 as well, with a still mind bonus against enchantments

At level 16 you'll likely have a second save on Fort saves and Improved Evasion, SR of 26 gives an additional layer of defense.

The Role:

So at this point we need to see what a Monk should be doing in combat. This Monk is not going to be running around combat, in fact, this Monk really, really wants to be static or move with 5' steps. He is attacking with blurred speed and EVERY attack that hits does good damage. If there is DR, the Monk draws the appropriate weapon to bypass DR, and if that means not attacking unarmed so be it. However, if the correct weapon isn't available he power attacks for all he's worth and blows through the DR with every hit.

This Monk grapples, but he doesn't grapple because he's got nothing else effective to do, he grapples because grappling happens to be the optimal choice when he does it. As levels advance he will likely either Bull Rush or Overrun as well. These are often his

choices when a full attack option is not available. This allows the Monk to forget that "officially" he is a 3/4 BAB class, because both his attacks and maneuvers are used as if he had a full BAB. This Monk may trip too, but tripping is a hobby, not a focus.

This Monk is going to get hit, and he is going to bleed. Burn Ki as required to pump up AC to survive the combat, then heal up between. This Monk doesn't dance around combat dodging blows, he messes it up and takes what he's given. He's going to limp out of combat with a, "...but you should see the other guy..."

This Monk doesn't attack at huge ranges, but at short ranges he'll throw shuriken. They are small, but he throws a ton of them, and each one that strikes packs a punch. He won't be all that accurate with these, and will miss as much as he hits, but it gives him a full attack option when normally one wouldn't be available. At higher levels, most Monks will abandon this option to use overrun or bull rush, though some will invest in their throwing ability, and the damage potential of each shuriken will be surprisingly high.

The Monk is not an effective 5th party member, or the party Flanker. He's the first party member. He's the big stupid fighter.

Why not play a Fighter?

If you play a fighter, you can do even more damage, you can have even better Combat Maneuver scores and you can have an even higher AC, so why not play a fighter?

1) Saving throws: The Monk not only has better saves, he has additional saving throw goodies like Improved Evasion, Spell Resistance and Still Mind

2) Movement: The Monk has a far superior movement rate than a fighter, in addition, the Monk can eventually Dimension Door to improve maneuverability even more, and to add insult to injury, the Monk has acrobatics with no armor check penalty.

3) AC: The Fighter may pull up a superior base AC if he works at it, but he will never come close to the Monk in Touch AC. That's the one that avoids Ray spells.

4) Stunning Fist: It may not be as good as stunning critical overall, but Monk's get it at first level, and it really doesn't deter from your regular attack to use it whenever you want.

5) Sheer offense: Using Ki and Medusa's Wrath an 11th level Monk is attacking 8 times per round. Every one of those attacks that hits does excellent damage.

I'm not saying you shouldn't play a fighter, but depending on your priorities, the Monk is a viable option to fill a similar role.