



What is the Best Caliber for Home Defense?

The smart ass answer is “the bigger the better”, “nothing without a 4 in the first number”, “a .45 ‘cuz they don’t make a .46”. All or none of these are right for you. If you think that was evasive, you are paying attention. There are so many variables that it is instructive to look at some of them and heed the advice of experts.

 What caliber can you consistently control?

- This takes some practice and requires some range time. The key here is shot placement. When stressed, what caliber can you deliver on target almost all of the time? Just recently, I introduced a zombie target to one of my students and required all of the shots during the range session to be head shots. It fits with the zombie theme, but it also worked to focus on a small target.
- Standing on a range and developing the skills to hit a target consistently takes practice. Now start working with movement. Without movement, you are an easy target. Now we have to think about the two way firing range. You must move to survive. Think about the cover and concealment offered by your home. Always move to cover if it is available.
- Go to the range and practice at different times of the day.

 What caliber do you own?

- The pistol in your hand is worth.... The pistol you will buy next quarter does you no good today. What do you have on hand right now to defend your home? That is your favorite caliber today.

 What about knock down power?

- Movies lie. That being said, a bigger, heavier projectile coming out of my pistol and landing on target is a good thing. Our troops are finding that several hits with 9MM ball (round nose full metal jacket) are usually required to stop a threat. A heavy hollow point 9MM that hits a vital spot on the target may stop the threat.

- I carry either a .45 caliber 1911 or my comfortable 9MM Glock 19 pistol. I know that the .45 has a heavier round, but I have been comfortably competent with the Glock for a long time. Both are loaded with high quality hollow point factory ammo that reacts predictably when it hits the threat. Think about impact on the target. The heavier .45 travels slower, but hits with more force. The 9MM travels very fast, but is considerably lighter.
- Good quality carry hollow point ammo makes a real difference. Modern ballistics engineers spend hours developing ammo that expands consistently and reacts reliably. Get into the habit of practicing with your carry or home defense ammo occasionally. It is usually much more expensive, but the charge and weight of the round is different enough that it could surprise you if you have not experienced it on the range. I usually fire a few carry rounds at the end of a range practice session to remind my wrist that it is different.

How about shot placement?

- A quick miss with a big caliber is easily overcome by an accurate hit by a smaller caliber round. The first hit on target usually wins. This being said, you have very little time to get that first round downrange. What is your threat and where should you shoot? In your home, consider the traffic funnels that we all face. Hallways, corners, that 300 pound coffee table that hits your knee each day. You know the traffic flow of your home. You know them, bad guys do not. You may have a small target to hit. Practice until you can reliably hit specific target spots.
- Practice on simulated people targets. Bull eye targets are fine for basic marksmanship training and competition, but very few bull eyes are involved with home invasions. There are studies that show that you are more likely to take the shot if you train on realistic targets.
- Bad guys can purchase or steal body armor. It is available on line and not real expensive. There are no real bullet proof vests. They are bullet resistant vests and are made to stop a specific range of projectiles. The bigger the bullet, the thicker and heavier the vest. Our combat troops have great equipment, but it weighs a ton! Armor normally protects the torso. Shots to the torso may move the bad guy with armor back, but it may not stop them. Consider head shots. If they wear body armor, they will have no protection for their head. Remember that comment about smaller targets? This is the application.

Remember: it is easy to kill a human, but it is very difficult to stop one quickly.

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