



Standing Firm Fitness

A Proactive Approach to Aging

Tai chi Chuan Qigong

Tai Chi Chuan is a martial derived from the Taoists philosophy the harmony of Ying and Yang energy. It is a composition of flowing graceful movements, one transitioning smoothly into the next, synchronizing breath and movement, bringing into play every part of the body, promoting good health, fine circulation, a quiet mind and exercising internal organs while preparing the body for self-defense.

Benefits of Tai chi Chuan

A simple 6,000 year old exercise, Tai chi promotes the health of the body, mind and spirit. It strengthens the muscles and organs, quiets the mind by moving energy or chi...the vital life force...through the body, removing blockages.

- ❖ As a moving meditation, Tai Chi encourages mental clarity, alertness, a flexible body, and good balance for a longer healthier life.
- ❖ By deepening the breathing, more oxygen benefits very cell. The immune system gets a boost.
- ❖ Up and down movements improve bone density; joints soften becoming more flexible, less likely to break or ache, improving quality of life.
- ❖ Stress and anxiety lessen; circulation improves to help normalize the cholesterol and blood pressure.
- ❖ Tai Chi is a natural way of moving the body for the prevention of disease as well as passive self-defense. Good attitude prevails when the body feels good. Healing begins naturally and we stay well, happy and serene.

How does Qigong and Tai Chi work to create the benefits of the practice!

- ❖ The practice initiates the "relaxation response"---triggered by any form of mental focus that frees the mind from its many distractions---which decrease the sympathetic function of the autonomic nervous system. As a result there is a decrease in heart rate and blood pressure, it dilates the blood capillaries, and optimizes the delivery of oxygen to all the cells of the tissues composing the organs of the body.
- ❖ The practice alters the neurochemistry profile (balances the brain chemicals called neurotransmitters that bond with receptor sites on tissue, enzyme, immune and other cells to excite or inhibit their function), moderating pain, depression and addictive cravings, as well as, optimizing immune capability.
- ❖ The practice enhances the efficiency of the immune system through increased rate and flow of the lymphatic fluid and activation of immune cells.
- ❖ The practice improves resistance to disease and infection by accelerating the elimination of toxic byproducts from the interstitial spaces in the tissues, organs and glands through the lymphatic system.
- ❖ The practice coordinates right/left brain hemisphere dominance promoting deeper sleep, reduced anxiety, and mental clarity.
- ❖ The practice *induces alpha and in some cases theta brain waves* which reduce heart rate and blood pressure, facilitating relaxation, mental focus and even paranormal skills. This optimizes the body's self-regulative mechanisms by decreasing the activity of the sympathetic nervous system.
- ❖ The practice moderates the function of the hypothalamus, pituitary and pineal glands, as well as the cerebrospinal fluid system of the brain and spinal cord which mediates pain and mood and accelerates immune function.
- ❖ The practice creates a framework for living with a more holistic philosophy that integrates body, mind and spirit.

Source: handout from Shasta County Senior Center and adapted by Chris Netto

ESSENTIAL TAI CHI PRINCIPLES

Tai chi contains essential principles, all of which are fundamental and similar in the different styles. *When you concentrate on the essentials of: awareness, Intention, structural integration, active relaxation, strengthening and flexibility, slow deep breathing, you speed up your progression, and you improve, no matter what style you do. Don't worry about the minor details. Focus your practice on the following principles.*

Classification of Principles: Movement; Body and Internal (*mind/spirit*).

Movement:

1. Make your movements deliberate, slow, even and continuous, maintaining the same speed throughout. In other words, control your movements.
2. Move as though there is a gentle resistance. Imagine that the air around you is dense and you have to move against this dense air. This will help you cultivate your inner force, the core muscles.

Body:

3. Be aware of your weight transference. First, center yourself, then control your balance, keeping your body alignments, and when you move backwards, forwards or sideways, touch down first, then gradually and consciously transfer your weight forward or backward.

Remember the parts of flowing into the forms

Waist steers the energy, shoulders follow and the energy is expressed through the arms

Three parts to the forms; the foot placement, the weight transfers and the follow through with arms...finding the stability before mobility

Essentially you are moving from a point of rootedness to a point of rootedness, thus the ending of one movement is but the beginning of the next.

4. Body Alignments. Be sure you keep your body in an upright position.

This reflects the unity of upper and lower body...core stability during the practice of the forms

Internal:

5. Loosening the joints. It is important to do the tai chi movements in a relaxed manner but relaxation here does not mean that all your muscles go floppy. You should be stretching, loosening. Overcome the pull of gravity with enough muscle tone. Try consciously and gently to stretch every joint from within, almost like an internal expansion of the joints.

6. Mental Focus and Intension. *Imagine and visualize a calm mental image of a very peaceful place.* Be sure not to get distracted from what you're doing, keep the mind still. *Focus on your movement and synchronized breathing so that your internal and external are well integrated. Remember the mind (Yi) directs the energy (Chi).*

Essentials of building posture place center of gravity over base of support vertical line passing 1 to 2 inches in front of pelvis just behind the navel

- *Plant feet hip to shoulder width apart into the floor while relaxing the toes into the floor as if sprouting roots into the core of the earth*
- *Straighten knees without locking them*
- *Level out the hips and center weight over the ball of the foot and big toe keeping hips open. As if you could pass a thin sheet of paper under the heels of your foot*
- *Lengthen the spine including the neck and lift the ribcage*
- *Keep the chin level, open the chest and roll the shoulders back and down.*
- *Sink into a horse riding stance for energy flow while breathing full and deep to relax, refresh and renew*

During your practice enjoy the gentle rocking motions and stretching movements to improve circulation and digestion. The chest exercises and controlled breathing are good for lung conditions and asthma. And the overall effect of the exercises is to reduce mental stress and physical tension carried in the muscles of the body.

Source Dr. Paul Lam and Nancy Kaye (Tai Chi for health newsletter) enhanced by Chris Netto