

# Tai Chi Warm Up

By Chris Netto

From Dr. Paul Lam's Tao Chi for Health Series

## These warm up exercises: You can do them lying down, seated or standing.

**Begin in good spinal alignment:** lengthened spine, keep shoulders relaxed, brace deep stabilizing muscles, engage pelvic floor and lower abdominal muscles. Keep hips open. Keep knees lined up over toes never past toes. Think about maintaining 10% contraction of pelvic floor and lower abdominal muscles.

Use Dan Tain breathing along with the movements while keeping upright posture

Area	Exercise	Notes or comments
Hands While walking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fingers open and close to loose fists</li> <li>At wrist fingers upward &amp; downward</li> </ul>	Loose fingers slow controlled extension Does this while walking clockwise and then counter clockwise. Moving from the wrist, keep elbows soft
Neck Extension Neck Rotation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look down at hands, palms face down, lift arms shoulder high, turn palms toward face extend back of neck, palms out lower arms and sink the breath</li> <li>Lift arms and palms toward face rotate head to right as right arms moves right and left hand opens down to hip. Repeat to left</li> </ul>	Keep shoulders down while lifting arms  Lift arms Do not rotate in the waist
Shoulders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rolling shoulders forward then back</li> <li>Arm circles palms up and forward lower down through center palms down</li> </ul>	Shoulder width stance Using wide ( <b>horse riding stance</b> ) bend and extend knees following arms if standing
Spine lengthener Pelvic rotation along spine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pushing heaven up and earth down</li> <li>Carry the ball left to right then right to left</li> </ul>	Hold ball with palms facing each other lifting one arm up and other goes to hip level palm down Bring left hand on top of the ball moving left. Right hand on top of ball moving right.
Hips— Hinging legs at hips front to back Opening hips moving leg laterally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Long arms back as left long leg with soft knee moves forward change hinging leg 3x switch legs</b></li> <li>Push the wall with palms right move leg at hip left. Weight transfer to other side</li> </ul>	To Hinge: Lead leg forward with heel of foot, arms float back; leg goes back tapping toe and arms float forward. <b>When doing any single joint weight bearing activity no more than 3 times on each side at one time.</b>
Knees: punch kick Punch lunge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rub hands together rub knees</li> <li>Lift thigh and gently extend knee while punching from hip with opposite loose fist</li> <li>Step forward into lunge and oppositional punch from hip</li> </ul>	then place both hands on one knee then other lift thigh from stable trunk extend lower leg and punch with opposite arm loose fist Repeat on other side Shallow lunge and punch with opposite loose fist
Ankle Standing on one leg and working the other ankle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flex and extend ankle with no weight on the working ankle</li> <li>Invert and evert ankle joint</li> <li>Heel Lift optional</li> </ul>	<b>When doing any single joint weight bearing activity no more than 3 times on each side at one time.</b>
Ending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shoulder rolls back</li> <li>Shake out hands</li> <li>Centering breathing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Commencement move to sink hips and relax in posture of tai chi focus breathing</b></li> </ul>

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## 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**