

Mid-America Institute on Aging

Tai Chi for Health



“Tai Chi is a universal medium for the cultivation of body, mind and spirit. It is natural. It is perennial. It is for everyone, of all ages. Learn to open yourself. Stretch your arms. Open your legs. Open your eyes. Open your throat. Breathe. Open your chest, your stomach, your pelvis. Open your center. Open your heart and your mind. Relax and breathe. You will find your horizons expanding. Your vision improving. Enjoy this open-arm, open-mind, open-heart position. Tai Chi is joy and happiness. Tai Chi frees the body and helps with relaxation and overall circulation. It activates muscles, sinews and joints in the body. It strengthens physical power without stress. It maintains youth and aliveness, and slows down the aging process through rejuvenation. Tai Chi calms and collects. It clears and sharpens the mind to help us in focusing and centering our daily activities. When the body and mind move harmoniously together, the human spirit soars. Tai Chi promotes a welcome meeting of the East and the West and reaffirms the importance of global awareness. The ultimate benefit of Tai Chi is to experience living in a healthy and wide-awake state of being.” Ken Davis from **Tai Chi Music.**

The practice of calmly moving slowly with grace, with focus on our center and breathing low and slow, should not be restricted to just the movements found in the Tai Chi forms. This attitude should be included in every movement or action taken in everyday life. By controlling the pace in which we live, including walking, talking, eating, and the way we respond to life in general, we may be able to control our heart rate and respiration, blood pressure and blood sugars, and other body functions that we normally think we can't. This can only lead to a longer, healthier life, which should be our main goal.

There are at least five essential qualities found in the spirit of Tai Chi training: slowness, lightness, focus, balance, and calmness.

Slowness aids in the development of awareness. Moving slow and deliberate helps to accumulate a reservoir of energy inside the body. Moving slow allows us to find direction instead of rushing about and scattering energy.

Lightness enables one to feel continuity of movement. We feel softness, regularity, a smooth even flow in our physical actions. We allow the energy to flow lightly through our movements from beginning to end without interruption and without struggle.

Focus allows us to eliminate all outside thoughts. By slowing down and feeling lightness, focus will happen automatically. If we can free our mind from thoughts that do not pertain to the subject at hand, we will have the clarity needed to accomplish our goal, whatever we have chosen.

Balance is essential to attaining our goals. Tai Chi requires absolute balance at all times with the mind as well as the body. Physical equilibrium is necessary to accomplish the physical movements of Tai Chi. Mental balance within the body is necessary for proper guidance. When the body is in perfect balance, there is no strain, no unnecessary constriction of the muscles. When the mind and body are in perfect balance, we are attaining harmony – Tai Chi.

Calmness is developed and nurtured by the mind. It seems to occur naturally with the practice of slow breathing along with the previous four essentials. In the development of these five essential qualities, a smooth and continuous whole is created. Each of the components of the exercises support and sustain each other.

Having correct posture at all times is very important in the successful execution of the forms found in Tai Chi. The more we practice, the more upright our posture becomes in our exercises. After a while, our posture will become more upright in our daily activities and routines and not just in the Tai Chi forms. If our posture is good on the outside, it means that the internal organs will also be in good position. By combining proper posture and proper breathing, we are headed in the right direction for good internal and external health.

Of all the arts, Tai Chi is the most private experience. You need no opponent to practice on, just yourself, developing your own psychic center and contributing to your own mental and physical well-being. You need no special equipment or special place.

Tai Chi – Grand Ultimate Chi – Life Force Energy
Chi Gung – Working With Life Force Energy

Low Breath is practiced by using the diaphragm and inhaling slowly through the nose, expanding the abdomen as if filling up a balloon located in your belly followed by a slow exhale through the nose, or mouth, allowing your belly to relax. The inhale-exhale cycle should be calm and relaxed; the exhale perhaps slightly longer than the inhale. This breathing technique should be our “normal” way of breathing. In Chi Gung practice, it is sometimes referred to as the Buddhist breath.

Complete Breath is practiced as a lung cleansing technique and designed to use the complete capacity of the lungs. It begins with the low breath and continues the inhale by expanding the chest, followed by a lift of the shoulders allowing the inhale to continue, attempting to completely fill the lungs from the bottom up. The exhale allows the body to relax completely to begin the process again. As with the low breath, the inhale-exhale cycle should be calm and relaxed; the exhale still longer than the inhale. Again the breathing is done through the nose with the exhale using nose or mouth.

Elephant Raises Its Trunk uses the low breath along with a physical movement and an image of chi rising up through the body from the Earth through our feet and up to the brain. One hand the Crane’s Beak rise up with inhale and open hand lowers with exhale. Other hand the Crane’s Beak rise up with inhale and open hand lowers with exhale. Both hands the Crane’s Beaks rise up with inhale, the Crane’s Beaks hold up while holding breath a few moments, then both open hands lower with exhale. The image of chi rising up with the inhale to nourish the brain and flowing down to Earth with exhale.

Tai Lung Tai Chi Breath uses the low breath and the complete breath along with upper body movements that coordinate with the breathing cycles. We begin using the low breath and as the exercise continues the breath is allowed to expand upward in a natural way. The lower body remains still while the upper body uses Tai Chi style movements. We may practice standing or sitting in a chair or on the floor like yoga.

Chi Gung Exercises

The following exercises are just a small example of many methods available. These are taken from **The Eight Pieces of Silk Brocade** as shared by Master Kenneth Cohen in his book **The Way of Qigong, The Art and Science of Chinese Energy Healing**.

Though I prefer to practice the exercises standing, they may be modified to a seated position. The movements should be done fluidly, not too fast, not too slow. Find a comfortable pace. Begin with 3 – 5 repetitions, working up to 7 – 9. Breathe slowly through the nose.

Two Hands Reach Skyward – Begin in Wu Chi stance, arms circle over head with fingers laced. Inhale stretching hands upward with palms facing down; Rising up on toes at the same time. Exhale as palms come down to rest on the crown and feet rest flat on the floor. Inhale again rising up on toes with palms facing up and exhale as palms come down to rest on the crown and feet rest flat. Repeat as appropriate.

Open the Bow – Standing in the Horse Riding stance, hands held in fists rolled inward at chest level so backs of hands are facing. Begin turning to face left, inhaling as the left open palm pushes straight out to the side and the right fist is pulled back toward the right shoulder. Exhale and bring fists back to starting position. Repeat to the other side, alternating sides as appropriate.

Raise Each Arm to Regulate the Spleen – Begin in Wu Chi stance, place left palm on crown facing up and right hand placed near right upper rib cage with palm facing down. Inhaling in this position, exhale as the left hand pushes up and the right hand pushes down. Circling both arms during next inhale to place right palm on crown facing up and left hand placed near left upper rib cage with palm facing down. Exhaling as the right hand pushes up and the left hand pushes down. Repeat as appropriate.

Looking Behind to Cure Fatigue and Stress – Begin in Wu Chi stance, with arms resting naturally beside the body, palms lifted slightly and facing down, slowly turn head from side to side. Inhale turning to the left with eyes looking to the side as far as possible and exhale relaxing back to the front. Repeat to the right, alternating sides as appropriate. This exercise loosens and stretches the neck, improves posture and spinal alignment, stimulates cerebral blood circulation, and improves vision.

Tai Chi Stances

Wu Chi Stance – Both feet flat shoulder width pointing straight, knees slightly bent, tailbone tucked in, low breath, all muscles relaxed, tongue touching roof of mouth, chin tucked in and string from top of head going up.

Bow Stance – Both feet flat shoulder width, one foot forward step pointing straight, back foot pointing out 45°, more weight in front foot.

Arrow Stance – Both feet flat shoulder width, one foot forward step pointing straight, back foot pointing out 45°, more weight in back foot.

Praying Mantis Stance – Both feet shoulder width, one foot forward step with heel only, back foot pointing out 45°, more weight in back foot.

Cat Stance – Front foot light toe touch close to back pointing out 45°, 90% weight in back foot.

Basic Introduction to Beginner Tai Chi

The Opening – Wu Chi Stance, deep knee bend, both hands rise up shoulder height as body rises, both hands lower as body lowers.

Part The Horse's Mane – Right hand on top of large ball close to chest, turn right foot out to 45°, left foot Cat Stance step to left Mantis Stance, both hands brush past while shifting weight forward to Bow Stance, right hand down by thigh and left hand in front of chest. Shift weight back to Mantis Stance while drawing both hands back to chest, shift weight forward to Bow Stance while pushing both hands forward.

Stroke The Bird's Tail – With right hand on bottom of small ball, pull down on right side while shifting weight back to Arrow Stance. Lifting ball up to shoulder with right fingers turned up, press forward while shifting weight to Bow Stance holding small ball on sides.

Using the **Low Breath**, inhale with **Arrow, Cat & Mantis Stance**, exhale forward to **Bow Stance**. After becoming comfortable with these movements, repeat on other side.

Hand Chi Gung One

Stand in Wu Chi Stance, grounding through feet, centered in lower abdomen, uplifted from the crown. Hands holding small chi ball across from lower dan tien. Breathing low and slow, on inhale hands slowly drift apart and come back to small ball with exhale. Think of drawing chi from Earth through your feet and up your legs with the inhale, and focus the chi to your hands with the exhale. After a few breathing cycles, hold small ball and lift upward across from Solar Plexus. Continuing the thought of drawing chi from Earth, slowly begin to rotate both hands as if rolling around the small ball. After a few rotations one way, reverse rotation. After a few breathing cycles, hold small ball and lift upward across from Third Eye. Without touching hands to face, press the small chi ball against forehead and begin to roll ball down the center of your body. From the Third Eye down across the Solar Plexus to the lower dan tien just below the navel, think of pressing the ball in and rest the palms on the lower abdomen. While standing in Wu Chi Stance, we think of grounding through our feet, a string of chi from our crown reaching upward to the Universe, and we are centered in the lower abdomen. After a few moments of grounding and centering, relax arms downward. Gathering chi from the Universe, we direct chi down through our energy field, smoothing and clearing impurities from our energy field and directing them down into the Earth. Gathering chi from the Universe, we direct chi down through the crown of our head, cleansing the internal organ system from toxins and directing impurities from our body down the legs and out the feet purging impurities into the Earth. Gathering chi from the Universe, we think of wrapping our body in a cocoon of protective chi. Here we are: We are cleansed. We are centered. We are grounded. We are protected.

Hand Chi Gung may be used at any time during the day for many reasons. For energy healers, it is a good way to encourage chi to flow to the hands. It's a good way to focus your thoughts during a hectic time. I like to use it after my Chi gung and Tai Chi practice as a way to close my workout. Be open and enjoy the experience.

Thank you very much for participating in **Tai Chi for Health**. Please feel free to stay in contact with me. Peace and Blessings. Sifu Ron.

812-204-6980 sifuron1983@gmail.com www.sifuron.com