

Guidelines for practising Tai Chi and Tai Chi exercises

- Important points for beginners

By Ian Deavin

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www.sheffordtaichi.org, e-mail: ian.deavin@btconnect.com

The idea is that these guidelines will get you started and while they are intended to be useful for anybody starting Tai Chi or coming to these classes from another style they may be particularly useful where health and mobility are significant issues.

In my experience Tai Chi is very different to what many students have previously been used to – so please be open minded. This is above all else a physical activity and you can expect repetitive physical exercises while standing throughout the class as well as physical interaction such as corrections of postures and movement. There is also likely to be a measure of description and discussion including visualisation.

1. At all times learn to look after yourself – from taking a break if you need, to moving your position in class so you can see the instructor – and especially becoming aware of your body and learning how to use the information.
2. Do not over exert - small soft, relaxed movements are good – do not try too hard, when you get bored look inside and learn to understand what your body is doing. The teacher may sometimes demonstrate large movements or low postures for the sake of clarity.
3. Standing upright – learn to stand vertically with balance and poise. Imagine you are suspended from the top of your head with your body weight hanging down.
4. Intention – keep thinking about what you are doing, especially about maintaining a relaxed vertical posture
5. Think up, be aware of down.
6. Seek to have a comfortable naturally “straight” and relaxed spine with soft and slightly bent knees - natural “straight” feels straight and vertical but with slight natural curves.
7. Consider you are moving about an axis down the centre of your body.
8. Relax your shoulders, back, waist, hips and groin.
9. Learn to stand and move so that your body is comfortable.
10. Ensure that joints move correctly and without pain.
11. Take special care of your knees – become aware of your knees and how they move – keep them aligned with your hips and feet – keep them bent, ensure that they only move forward and back and that they do not twist, move sideways or in circles – also that you do not take them forward beyond the balls of your feet or lock them straight.
12. Moving your hips – learn to move your hips independently – this will also release twisting of the knees.
13. Do not hyperextend anything.
14. Practise moving by placing one foot before transferring weight from the other.
15. Become sensitive to the floor and to things you touch.

16. Become aware of your body and its internal feelings.
17. Relaxing – learn that being relaxed is not collapsed and learn how to relax your whole body while standing.
18. If movement is painful seek to readjust your body feelings and positioning so that movement is relaxed and comfortable.
19. Learn the difference between pain that is a warning of damage and pain that comes from hard work eg the difference between muscular pain that will pass and damage pain such as joint pain that indicates a longer term problem.
20. You chose to be in the class – you also have choice and responsibility while you are there – you do not have to do anything you do not choose to do – therefore for example adjust how you practise to suit your abilities and to accommodate any specific problem while seeking to maintain correct principles of movement. e.g. only practise larger movements as they become comfortable, or for example, if you have a joint replacement or a mental/emotional problem, work within the limits of that condition. If there is something you find painful or for other reasons do not wish to do, then discuss with the teacher to find a way to address this issue.
21. Co-ordinate arm and leg movement with the hips.
22. Develop the feeling in movement that your arms – and then your legs are being pulled from your centre axis and then from the lower abdomen.
23. Practise soft “natural movement” of the arms and legs, and the gentle spiralling that it implies.
24. Learn to be mindful – and practise the habit at all times.
25. Observe and explore your posture, balance and movement – seek to understand your comfort zone and to notice if it changes – learn to adapt to change whether positive or negative.
26. Practise little and often – create an enjoyable daily habit that is comfortable and sustainable - if you need to sit down or otherwise take time out from your exercise then do so.
27. Learn left and right – it will help.
28. Learn to observe and notice your instructor and your body
 - Copy your instructor carefully
 - Listen to what is going on in your body
29. Study detail and think about what you are doing and why
30. Ask questions.
31. Practise at home between classes.
32. You may feel confused – this is normal in learning any new skill – just relax and enjoy the movement.
33. At all times learn to look after yourself – and consider what that means.

