

Tai Chi Nation Guide to Tai Chi – Part 1

Eight things that can improve your posture, support you to move with less resistance, and help you enjoy a happier and healthier life.

In the practice of Tai Chi we move at a slow pace to assist concentration and the development of kinesthetic awareness. A stable and aligned posture allows the whole body to relax (particularly the muscles), so that movements are free from tension and awkwardness. Through practicing in this way, we also begin to explore different ways in which we can move through our life that result in less stress and a greater sense of wellbeing.

In Tai Chi movement the turning of the body is done on the central axis and is directed by the centre of the body or waist. When turning, it is important to avoid twisting the body, causing excessive strain on the joints, and the hips and shoulders are encouraged to move in unison. The shoulders should be relaxed and the hands open, with the fingers gently separated. This will encourage the energy (Qi) to flow throughout the body, and acupuncture points to be open and free from obstructions.

Yang Cheng Fu (1883 – 1936), a Tai Chi master, originally compiled a set of 10 points for guidance for Tai Chi practice that still form the foundation of Tai Chi practice today. These points are concise and relatively to understand, and form an excellent framework for initial practice. This list is based on several different translations, as well as our own experience of them. We hope they may act as a framework supporting your Tai Chi practice or as simple things that may improve your posture, supporting you to move with less resistance, and begin enjoying a happy healthier life.

Stand like a Tree; Relax the Hips and Waist

Your body should be aligned so its weight falls evenly into the feet and down into the ground. This is made more accessible when you tilt the pelvis forwards slightly allowing the weight of your upper body to sink into the pelvic girdle. When your posture is stacked up in this way it will naturally create a stable foundation for movement. Tai Chi movement and the power it generates are said to be rooted in the feet, transmitted through the legs, directed by the waist, and expressed through the fingers.

Sinking the Chest and Raising the Back

Sinking means to soften and relax the chest downwards so the Qi (energy) can sink to the *Dan Dian* (lower abdomen). At the same time the spine should be lengthened and upright, with the tailbone allowed to drop downwards towards the ground.

Top of the Head Light and Gently Suspended

When the chin is slightly tucked-in, this takes the pressure off the back of the neck, facilitating a sense of lightness at the crown of the head. This is said to allow the *spirit* to rise to the crown, and can be helped by visualizing a golden thread gently pulling the crown of your head up to the sky.

Continuity of Movement

The movements should be continuous from beginning to end in an endless circle, like a river flowing unceasingly towards the sea. This constant flow of Tai Chi imbues a sense of unity within you and in relationship to the world around, dissolving blockages in the energy flow and giving a sense of unity and joy.

Stillness in Movement

The slower we practice Tai Chi, the quieter our minds can become. When the mind is still and the body more tranquil, the breathing becomes deeper and the Qi can sink down towards the Dan Dian. This has a soothing effect on mind and body, and your movements will be more active and nimble.

Differentiation of Solid and Empty Stances

If you shift the weight of the body on to the right leg, then the right leg is solidly planted on the ground and the left leg is in an empty stance (and visa-versa). In this way your body can move in a balanced way without effort. This type of movement can be likened to the grounded yet sensitive movements of a cat: no weight or force comes forward until the foot is placed on the ground.

Unifying the Upper and Lower Body

Since each part of the body is connected, any movement or change in one part of the body affects the whole body. When we allow ourselves to move in such a naturally unified way, the body becomes truly responsive and movement is unhindered.

Sinking the Shoulders and Elbows

Our shoulders and elbows should both be relaxed downwards. If you lift your shoulders the *Qi* will rise with them and the whole body will be without *root*. Relaxing the shoulders and elbows will add to the sense of ease in our movement.

This short guide has been prepared by Andrew Broadhead.