

Step by Step

# TAI CHI

for Seniors



Dejun Xue

# **TAI CHI** **FOR SENIORS**

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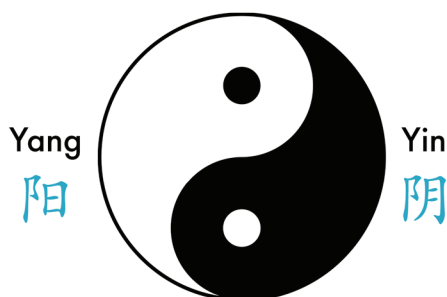
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# **TAI CHI** **FOR SENIORS**

# COMMENTS ON TAI CHI FOR SENIORS

*Tai Chi Quan* is a Chinese word. *Quan* means fist and *Tai Chi Quan* is a martial art based on the theory of *Tai Chi*; although, usually, *Tai Chi Quan* is simply called *Tai Chi*.



Yin and yang in harmony constitute the state of *Tai Chi*. *Tai Chi for Seniors* is an exercise developed from the traditional *Tai Chi* (*Tai Chi Chuan*) with emphasis on the harmony of *yin* and *yang*.



This is a symbol of *Tai Chi*. The yellow portion of the symbol is *yang*, which represents the characteristics of heaven. The red portion of the symbol is *yin*, which represents the characteristics of earth.



*Tai Chi for Seniors* employs relaxation. After *Tai Chi* start, the body should be held erect, naturally. The height of the body should remain stable, fluctuating neither up, nor down. The head should be positioned



as if you were holding up a weight. Do not lean either forward nor backward; otherwise, the chest will be stressed. Do not puff up the chest, but relax it naturally. If the shoulders are raised, they will be stressed; therefore, do not raise the shoulders, but relax them naturally.

Do not raise elbows up too high, nor too close to ribs. Drop the elbows naturally. Tuck the buttocks in; otherwise, the internal organs will be tense. Relax the wrists. Do not stretch the palms of your hands, but allow them to open naturally, like fans. The tips of your fingers should never be higher than the eyebrows. If the hands are too high, the ribs will be stressed. Do not stretch the fingers, but relax them naturally.

When holding a fist, the fist is loose, forming a hole with the fingers. When pushing, force does not originate from the hands, but from the body. Do not stress the lips. Do not frown. Do not grit your teeth. Relax the face. The tongue touches the roof of the mouth. Any saliva forming in the mouth, is swallowed. While the entire body is relaxed, the mind focuses on the flow of energy around the body in response to breathing and movement. The movements progress smoothly without pause. From the preparation of a movement through to the end, there is no starting or stopping point; all postures are connected smoothly. Before the true end of a posture, another posture begins.

*Tai Chi for Seniors* employs rhythm. The movements alternate between the accumulation and release of energy. During the accumulation of energy, the body contracts, with the arms and hands brought close to the body; during the release of energy, the body expands, with arms reaching out, pushing or punching.

## Accumulation of Energy: Yin (阴)

## Release of Energy: Yang (阳)

To accumulate energy is *yin*; to release energy is *yang*. When *yin* and *yang* are in harmony, the accumulation and release of energy are in balance.



The alternation of *yin* and *yang* is rhythmic, like the alternation of night and day. To be rhythmic, the movements encompassing a large distance are faster than the movements encompassing a smaller distance, so that the duration of time used to accumulate energy is equal to the duration of time used to release energy.

Time [Accumulation of Energy: Yin (阴)]



Time [Release of Energy: Yang (阳)]

Correspondingly, the duration of time for inhalation is equal to the duration of time for exhalation. Usually, inhalation and exhalation takes about eight seconds, each. The slower the movement, the deeper the breath; therefore, if you want to breathe deeper, you can increase inhalation and exhalation to twelve seconds, each. If you wish to spend less time practicing *Tai Chi*, you can inhale and exhale for only four seconds, each. Usually, a complete cycle of breathing in sixteen seconds is most comfortable and beneficial to your health.

*Tai Chi for Seniors* is thorough, more like a slowly moving tree, rather than a fast running car. While the tree is being blown by the wind, its whole body moves, with the exception only of its roots, which are still. In contrast, a car is not rooted in the ground at all, but while it is running, its internal parts, (seats, dashboard, etc.) are still. While practicing *Tai Chi for Seniors*, the feet touch the ground fully and firmly, like the roots of a tree. Try to keep your hips facing forward. The lower body, from hips to feet, is like the main trunk of a tree. Turning the shoulders to the left or right, is like swaying the branches of a tree around its trunk. In this way, the spine twists. Each section of the spine, the spinal cord and the internal organs, move. The spine acts like an axle, with the shoulders turning around it. The force comes from the muscles surrounding the spine, rather than from the shoulders. Then, the shoulders bring movement to the arms, the arms bring movement

to the hands, and the hands bring movement to the fingers.

The order of movement is: shoulders first, arms second, hands third, fingers last. Fingers follow hands, hands follow arms, arms follow shoulders. The move is slow, but not still. All joints at hips, shoulders, elbows, wrists and fingers are moving completely, and rotate in different directions, not just in one direction. The movement of the arms is not only 'extension and contraction', but rotation, as well. The forearms rotate around the elbows and the hands rotate around the wrists, counter-clockwise or clockwise, as demonstrated in the dragon dance. There is almost no one-dimensional movement; most of movements are three-dimensional. The lungs are flushed thoroughly. The slow rhythmic movement facilitates deep breathing.

During inhalation, the lower abdomen contracts and the diaphragm raises up. The fresh air filling the lungs, reaches the upper lobes, and the internal organs are pressed gently. When the body is twisted, turning to the left or right side, the internal organs are pressed harder. During exhalation, the lower abdomen and diaphragm expands and the carbon dioxide is released. The internal organs are relaxed. With slow motion and relaxation, the *qi* (mind-focused point) moves progressively, like fluid flowing around the whole body, reaching the four terminus areas: the tips of the toes, the tips of the fingers, the top of the head and the tip of the tongue.

*Tai Chi for Seniors* is flexible. The footsteps may be flexible. You do not have to move your feet exactly as I am doing. You may move one of your feet back, forward, to the side or upward, while I am moving my foot forward. You may move one of your feet forward, while I am stepping back with my foot. Just remember to alternate the weight on your feet.

By keeping footsteps flexible, you can practice *Tai Chi for Seniors* indoors, outdoors and even when travelling, without being limited by space.

The postures may be flexible. You do not have to move your hands exactly as I am doing. Your hands may be pointing to a position higher or lower than my hands, because we are practicing for health, not for fighting. However, you should follow the basic principles of *Tai Chi*.

The basic principles are:

- Relax: relax the chest, shoulders, elbows, wrists and fingers. Keep the head erect and aligned with the spine and tuck in buttocks.
- The spine acts as an axle: stand with both feet firmly touching the ground, like the roots of a tree. During movement, the hands follow the arms, the arms follow the shoulders, and the shoulders rotate around the spine.
- Three external coordinations: the head coordinates with the buttocks, the elbows coordinate with the knees and the hands coordinate with the feet.
- Three internal coordinations: vision, breathing and mind are coordinated.
- Five elements: move forward, back, turn to left, turn to right and keep body straight.
- The height of the body is flexible: if you feel tired, your postures may be high. If you feel energetic, your postures may be very low. But the

height of body should be stable, unwavering, from *Tai Chi* start to end.

- The tips of the fingers are never higher than the eyebrows.

The order of movements is flexible, and you can practice *Tai Chi* any time it is convenient for you. You may practice just one portion of *Tai Chi for Seniors*, or only one single posture; however, in order for it to be beneficial to your health, practicing *Tai Chi* at least thirty minutes a day is necessary.



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# **TAI CHI** **FOR SENIORS**

# 1. PREPARATION



- Be calm for a few seconds. Stand straight.
- Relax your face and shoulders.
- Drop your hands naturally at your sides.
- Relax the chest and hips.



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- Begin to inhale.
- Move your feet apart so that they are aligned with your shoulders.
- With palms up, raise both hands gradually, taking about 8 seconds to reach chest height.



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- Begin to exhale.
- Turning the palms of your hands down, unlock the knees and let your hands fall gradually for about 8 seconds until they are naturally at your sides.
- The entire body should relax and become slightly lower in position as the hands drop.
- This body stature should be maintained throughout the practice of Tai Chi.
- The duration of inhalation and exhalation is determined by the depth of breath and the speed of movement; i.e., the slower the movement, the deeper the breath.
- You should practice combining movement and breath until it feels comfortable for you.
- Begin by inhaling for 4 seconds and exhaling for 4 seconds.
- You may then increase the duration of breathing by doubling or even tripling the amount of seconds, as

you decrease the speed of your movement.

- Deep breathing is good for overall health, but it should feel comfortable.
- Do not hold your breath.
- With the palms of your hands down and the fingers bent, try to align the two middle fingers on an imaginary line, parallel to and slightly above your waist.
- The hands should not be touching the body.
- Drop the wrist. Bend the knees slightly.
- The body weight should be evenly distributed on both feet.



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## 2. STARTING TAI CHI



- Begin to inhale.
- Shift your weight to the left foot. Bring your right hand down, turning it so that the palm faces up. At the same time, bring the left hand up, palm facing down, as if you were holding a large ball in front of your body with two hands. Your head should be facing your left wrist. The left elbow should be dropped, wrists relaxed, the right arm bent. Do not bring the right elbow too close to the body. The left foot holds almost full weight of body. It is yang. The right foot holds almost no weight. It is yin. But, the right foot still fully touches the ground to retain balance.



- Begin to exhale.
- Reverse the rotation of both hands, as if you were rotating a large ball. The head should be facing the right wrist.
- Gradually shift your weight from the left foot to the right foot, alternating yin and yang, as the right foot becomes yang, and the left foot becomes yin.




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# Step by Step **TAI CHI** for Seniors

Tai Chi is a type of martial art very well known for its defense techniques and health benefits. This martial art has evolved over the years into an effective means of alleviating stress and anxiety. It has been considered to be a form of “meditation in motion” which promotes serenity and inner peace.

If you are a senior seeking to improve your health or simply wish to learn or practice Tai Chi in a harmonious pace, *Tai Chi for Seniors, Step by Step* will benefit you.

*Tai Chi for Seniors, Step by Step* comprises step by step detailed instruction from the Tai Chi master Dejun Xue (薛德钧), author of numerous books on Chinese Classics and Tai Chi.



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