



Welcome to the S.E.M.K.A. Tai Chi & Qi Gong



An Introduction to Safe Training and Some Frequently Asked Questions

“Tai Chi is useful for health, relaxation and self-defence in that order”

Can Anyone Do Tai Chi?

Tai Chi might well be completely different to any other hobby or interest that you have studied in the past. There is no end point to the learning and no day when the training will ever be complete or perfect. It is an ongoing learning process for all those who choose to study it. There are no exams, no tests and little or no competition involved.

Professor Cheng Man Ching (A famous Tai Chi master, medical doctor and inventor of the style that I teach) was famous for quoting that ‘There are no secrets in Tai Chi’. He believed that anyone could master Tai Chi and all that is needed is patience (with yourself), perseverance (keeping on going) and practice.

One of the best things about Tai Chi is that literally anyone can learn it. Any person of any age or fitness level can practice the exercises. Even certain elements of Tai Chi can be performed whilst lying down, sitting, walking or even just in the mind.

You need no special equipment, just loose, comfortable clothing and flat shoes. There is no uniform, no belts and no grading system. There is no religion to convert to and you do not need to learn any Chinese.

Tai Chi teaches you not to depend on anything or anyone for your own health and happiness. It teaches that you are in control of such things. Through concentration and a deeper understanding of your body you can relax muscles, open your joints, improve your posture, release blocked emotions and begin to heal yourself. Tai Chi is truly an amazing self-help technique.

How Do I Prepare Before a Class?

It is my advice to aim to turn up to each class 5 or even 10 minutes early. It will rarely happen that you will arrive this early. This punctuality is not for my benefit but for your own frame of mind. The stress of running late is often difficult to leave behind on arrival. If you arrive early (or on time) and begin to stand and relax before the class has started, you will be able to make the most of each class. This is of course entirely optional, and I am always happy to receive latecomers in all my classes. It is advised to refrain from eating big meals before a class. Exercising straight after eating is bad for your digestion. Leave at least an hour after a small snack and at least two to four hours after a big meal before doing any exercise.

What Do I Need To Bring With Me To A Class?

Bring flat shoes or Tai Chi shoes if you have them and wear light, loose fitting, comfortable clothing. For safety reasons a minimum amount of jewellery should be worn. Please bring some drinking water with you, as it is important to drink plenty of water whilst you exercise. If you want to write notes for later then please feel free to bring a notebook and pen. This is of course, entirely optional and several handouts covering different aspects of Tai Chi practice and descriptions for all the movements are always available.

What Happens If I Feel Pain or Discomfort During My Practice?

Any **sharp pain** you experience whilst training is a possible sign of injury, and you should stop immediately. Tell your tutor and seek medical advice if necessary.

Dull aches and pains felt during your training will be commonplace and are to be expected. Do not be afraid of this type of 'pain'. You can do no damage to yourself by standing still and relaxing your body. Tai Chi is in fact much harder work than it looks, and your body will have many engrained habits and layers of tension; some going as far back as childhood.

As you begin to relax, adrenalin and other pain-suppressing chemicals and hormones will begin to stop flowing and your muscles, some of which will have been held tense for very long periods, may ache before they relax completely.

Tai Chi training will help you to straighten your posture and to relax your body on a very deep level.

These aches and pains will pass, and new ones will perhaps then become apparent. Tai Chi takes you through a journey of self-discovery and a deepening understanding of how your body functions. You will learn to identify more and more clearly where your own tension occurs and to gradually let this tension go. Your muscles and bones (especially in your legs) will grow stronger and as a result your training (and everyday physical activities) will become easier.

During any class feel free to stop and take breaks whenever you feel it is necessary. Rest whenever you want to, shake your legs out and massage tense areas of your body as and when you need to. You and only you have the unique ability to feel how your body is at any point in time. Always trust your own instincts as you better than anyone will always know what is best for your own body. Never rush any of the movements, never jerk your body or lock or close your joints.

Do not push yourself too much and always work within your own comfortable range. Overdoing it usually comes from trying to do as much as others and forgetting the principle of always looking to yourself and working within your own comfort zone. Always make each movement with your full concentration, and always slowly, gently and softly. Always remember **you are responsible for your own safety.**

Who Is Responsible for Your Learning?

Another important point for consideration is that each student is responsible for his or her own learning. I once had a student who complained that she could not see what was going on from the back of the class. My advice to her was to move to the front. If you cannot see during a demonstration, then it is vital to move to a vantage point from where you can see. Taking a few steps backwards and taking in the whole movement rather than focusing on just what the hands or feet are doing is extremely useful. My advice is to stand still and watch demonstrations mindfully and in “peripheral vision”, rather than copying along at the same time. There will be plenty of time for your own practice and your mind will find it difficult to focus on two things at once. If you would like to see a move demonstrated again – please ask! Remember; the only stupid question is the one that you did not ask. If you feel that your course is moving too fast then please ask to revise the last move before continuing onto the next.

Any questions, comments or feedback about any Tai Chi related topic are always welcome. Any other discoveries or questions that you may feel are of a more private nature; these can be discussed either before or after class. I normally arrive 10 minutes early. I can also be contacted between classes by telephone on 07778058482 semka@btinternet.com web site www.tenshochi.com

How Hard Should I Train?

It is important to note that you can choose to train as little or as hard as you prefer. The deeper your knees are bent during your practice the harder work the exercises will become. Aim to start with high stances and then slowly work towards bending your knees a little further, as your legs grow stronger. During demonstrations or whilst your tutor is answering questions this time can be used for standing practice or for rooting into one leg as you watch and listen. It is of course entirely up to you how much you put into your Tai Chi and of course how much you get out of it.

Do I Need to Practice Between Classes?

Feel free to do as little or as much practice as you like. I advise that a realistic goal is to practice for one or perhaps two minutes per day. If one day you wish to practice for longer than feel free to do so. Simple 'standing' exercises, or 'Chi Kung' movements can be practiced whilst waiting for the kettle, the bus or whilst in the supermarket queue. Using this method, you can slowly introduce practice into your everyday life without the additional stress of not sticking to stricter practice regimes. Other aspects of your training including breathing or relaxation techniques can be practiced anywhere at any time. Of course, the more repetitions of your actual Tai Chi movements you practice the faster you will improve. Accurate, mindful repetition is the only way I have discovered of improving at anything.

If nothing else, remember it is always important to do your best. You will not feel relaxed or happy with yourself (or others) if you do not always do your best. Tai Chi is designed to be practiced every day, however it is my opinion that the desire to train more frequently and for longer periods is one of the many things that increases with continued practice.

What happens if I cannot remember all the moves?

Tai Chi practice is a lifelong journey in which patience and kindness to yourself (and others) are paramount, and one in which there will always be more for you to learn about each

posture and principle. The most important thing is to relax and to feel happy about your Tai Chi. Focus on the positive, your gradual improvement and always be kind to yourself rather than stressing about not training enough or which moves you can or cannot remember. With time and practice everyone improves. Always allow as much time as you need to learn new postures and enjoy your journey getting there. When it comes to Tai Chi practice, most students at one time or another will stress about what they can or cannot remember. Everyone feels this way and it is wise to bear in mind that it is in fact a miracle that you can remember any of the moves at all. Always remember it is how you move that is most important in your practise and not how many moves you can recall.

When and Where Should I Practice?

It is considered by most teachers that the best times for training are first thing in the morning and last thing before you go to sleep. However, this is just a general rule. Some people find that their bodies are too stiff in the morning and some people find that they find it harder to concentrate in the evening. I find it useful to practice whenever I cannot sleep or whenever I feel stressed or tired. Ideally choose a warm, quiet, well-ventilated place for your practice. Fresh air is great but always avoid draughts and strong winds. Wrap up warm when you are outside in the cold, especially when performing standing postures. Protect your lower back (your kidneys) by tucking your clothes in and protect your neck with a scarf or similar. Natural surroundings such as mountains, woodlands, beaches or rivers can be both refreshing and enlightening. Isolation can also be useful at first to help maintain your concentration. Whenever training indoors, always ensure that you have enough room to practice so that you do not have to stop halfway through to move furniture etc.

As mentioned before, aspects of Tai Chi training can be practiced anywhere at any time. I find whenever I am standing still with “nothing to do” or I am waiting for something or someone; I practice feeling my feet relaxing into the floor, relaxing throughout my whole body and noticing my breathing. Whenever I walk anywhere, I feel my feet on the floor, my ankles softening and my whole body relaxing deeply as I move. When I am driving, I practice relaxing my shoulders as well as my breathing techniques.

Class Details

Summary of Syllabus

Warm up / cool down exercises
Simple Qi Gong exercises (Eight Strand of Brocade & Shibashi 1,2, 3.)
Yang Style of Tai Chi 8 & Tai Chi 13 to introduce some of the basic movements to the students before starting the Tai Chi 37 step form
Yang Style Basic Form (24)
Yang Style Short Form (37 Step Cheng Man Ch'ing Form)
Yang Style Long Form (150)
The T'ai Chi 'principles'
Basic 'sticking', 'yielding' and Pushing Hands Exercises
Basic self-defence applications
Meditation and relaxation exercises
Instruction in using the breath while moving through the Form
Instruction in Tensho Chi forms.

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TAI CHI BENEFITS

Tai Chi is a traditional Chinese martial art that combines deep breathing, slow and gentle movements, and meditation. It is known for its numerous health benefits and has been practiced for centuries. Here are several ways in which Tai Chi can help improve health:

- 1. Physical Fitness:** Tai Chi involves slow, flowing movements that engage the entire body, promoting flexibility, balance, and strength. Regular practice can enhance muscle tone, joint stability, and overall physical fitness.
- 2. Balance and Fall Prevention:** Tai Chi emphasizes weight shifting and coordinated movements, which can improve balance and stability. This is particularly beneficial for older adults who may be at a higher risk of falls.
- 3. Stress Reduction:** The slow, rhythmic movements of Tai Chi, combined with focused breathing and mindfulness, create a calming and meditative experience. Practicing Tai Chi can help reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, promoting mental well-being.
- 4. Cardiovascular Health:** While Tai Chi is a low-impact exercise, it still provides a moderate aerobic workout. The gentle movements increase heart rate, improve circulation, and can help lower blood pressure, reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases.
- 5. Pain Management:** Tai Chi has shown positive effects in managing chronic pain conditions, such as arthritis, fibromyalgia, and lower back pain. The gentle stretching and movements help improve joint flexibility and relieve muscle tension.

- 6. Mental Clarity and Cognitive Function:** Regular practice of Tai Chi has been associated with improved cognitive function, including attention, memory, and concentration. It may also help reduce the risk of age-related cognitive decline and neuro degenerative diseases like Alzheimer's.
- 7. Immune System Boost:** Some studies suggest that Tai Chi can enhance immune function, promoting a stronger immune system response and improving overall health and resistance to illness.
- 8. Mind-Body Connection:** Tai Chi emphasizes the connection between the mind and body, promoting self-awareness, focus, and mindfulness. This integration of mind and body can help cultivate a sense of inner calmness and overall well-being.

Health Benefits of Qigong

Qigong (also spelled "Qi Gong" or "Chi Kung") is a traditional Chinese practice that involves coordinated movements, controlled breathing, and meditation. It is often described as a form of "energy cultivation," with the term "Qi" referring to life energy or vital force, and "Gong" meaning work or cultivation. Qigong is practiced for a variety of reasons, including health, martial arts training, and spiritual development.

1. Stress Reduction and Relaxation:

- Qigong emphasizes deep, controlled breathing and gentle movements, which help activate the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing stress and promoting relaxation.
- Regular practice can decrease cortisol levels, which are associated with stress.

2. Improved Mental Health:

- Qigong has been shown to help alleviate symptoms of anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders by promoting a calm and focused state of mind.
- The meditative aspects of Qigong can enhance mindfulness and emotional regulation.
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3. Enhanced Immune Function:

- Studies have shown that Qigong can boost the immune system, potentially helping to reduce the frequency and severity of illnesses.

- The gentle exercise combined with breath control is thought to improve circulation and the body's ability to eliminate toxins.

4. Better Balance and Coordination:

- The slow, deliberate movements in Qigong improve physical balance, coordination, and flexibility, which is particularly beneficial for older adults in preventing falls.

5. Pain Management:

- Qigong has been found to be effective in managing chronic pain, such as that associated with arthritis, fibromyalgia, and other conditions.
- It helps by enhancing relaxation, reducing muscle tension, and improving circulation.

6. Cardiovascular Health:

- Regular practice of Qigong can lower blood pressure, improve heart rate variability, and enhance overall cardiovascular health.
- It promotes better oxygenation of tissues and can improve circulation.

7. Respiratory Health:

- The breathing techniques used in Qigong can strengthen the respiratory system, increase lung capacity, and improve oxygenation of the blood.
- This can be particularly beneficial for individuals with respiratory conditions like asthma.

8. Energy and Vitality:

- Practitioners often report increased levels of energy and a greater sense of vitality, which is believed to come from the cultivation and balance of "Qi" in the body.
- Regular practice is associated with increased stamina and reduced fatigue.
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9. Spiritual Growth and Mind-Body Connection:

- Qigong is traditionally considered a path to spiritual development, enhancing the connection between mind, body, and spirit.
- It fosters a sense of inner peace, awareness, and harmony, which can

be spiritually fulfilling.

10. Cognitive Function:

- Qigong can improve focus, memory, and cognitive function, making it beneficial for people of all ages, particularly the elderly.
- The practice encourages mental clarity and sharpness through its meditative aspects.

Who Can Benefit from Qigong?

Qigong is accessible to people of all ages and fitness levels. It is particularly beneficial for:

- **Older adults:** Qigong's low-impact nature makes it ideal for improving balance, flexibility, and overall health.
- **People with chronic conditions:** Those suffering from chronic pain, cardiovascular issues, or respiratory conditions may find relief through Qigong.
- **Individuals under stress:** The meditative aspects of Qigong help manage stress, anxiety, and mental fatigue.

Conclusion

Qigong is a versatile practice that offers a wide range of health benefits, from physical improvements to mental and emotional well-being. Its gentle, mindful movements make it a suitable exercise for almost everyone, providing a holistic approach to health and wellness.