



## **The benefits and evidence behind tai chi**

### **What is tai chi?**

Tai chi, also called tai chi chuan, is a health-promoting exercise that was originally developed as a martial art in 13<sup>th</sup> century China. Tai chi combines gentle and flowing movements with breathing exercises and mindfulness. You don't have to be in great shape or the best of health to practice tai chi, and it can be easily adapted for anyone.

Tai chi is a great form of exercise for people with persistent pain. Whilst helping to keep your muscles and joints healthy, tai chi is very relaxing and can help to calm the mind through mindful practice.

### **What are the benefits of tai chi?**

In people with persistent pain, tai chi has been proven to reduce pain and improve physical fitness, and may also help to improve fatigue, anxiety, sleep and quality of life.

Tai chi has also been proven to:

- Enhance the body's immune system
- Improve cardiovascular and respiratory health
- Reduce blood pressure
- Reduce the risk of falls
- Reduce stress and depression

### **Where can I do Tai chi?**

Joining a class whether face to face or virtually offers you help and instruction from an instructor as you progress, with the added benefit of the social side of being part of a group. There are many groups available in the county and our team can help you to discover some that might be on your doorstep.

The benefit of Shibashi Tai chi is that you can practise by yourself if you prefer, and we have resources on our website to help you learn the basic moves: <https://tinyurl.com/2xe5fsz3>  
This form of Tai chi can be practised indoors, or outdoors, seated or standing, making it well adapted to anyone, and particularly for people with pain conditions.

### **Why Breathing?**

Another of the benefits of Tai chi is the involvement of breath. Breathing in a relaxed calm way is known to reduce our body's stress response, and has the power to reduce our pain. Tai chi movements encourage us to coordinate our breath with our movement, training our mind body connection, and a gentleness of pace. When practicing Shibashi we use a style of breathing called abdominal breathing or diaphragmatic breathing. You inhale through your



nose and exhale through your mouth. It is called abdominal breathing because the movement of your diaphragm will expand your lower abdomen during the inhale and contract your lower abdomen during the exhale.

### **How to start**

Shibashi Tai chi is very effective and easy to learn. You can begin by practicing a few movements at a time; you do not need to remember the full 18 movement sequence. When practiced regularly, most people will be able to master all 18 movements within a short period of time. You should start to see some results if you practice this exercise on a daily basis for three months.

### **How to practice**

In Shibashi Tai chi each movement should flow naturally and link seamlessly from one to the other without any break in rhythm and form. Coordinate your whole body and relax the movements in time with your breathing keeping all your movements smooth and continuous.

### **Sung: starting posture**

stand with feet shoulder width apart

- arms hang down
- palms face in to thighs
- relax the whole body
- knees slightly bent
- clear the mind
- remain in this posture for a few minutes



#### **1) Waterfall**

Raise arms to shoulders:

- turn palms to face backwards
- fingers point downwards and slightly curved
- breathe in
- raise body
- draw arms up to shoulder height and width
- palms face down
- elbows and wrists are slightly bent

Return arms to sides:

- turn palms to face forwards
- fingers point upwards and are slightly curved
- breathe out
- sink body down with knees slightly bent
- draw arms down to thighs
- palms face out to backwards





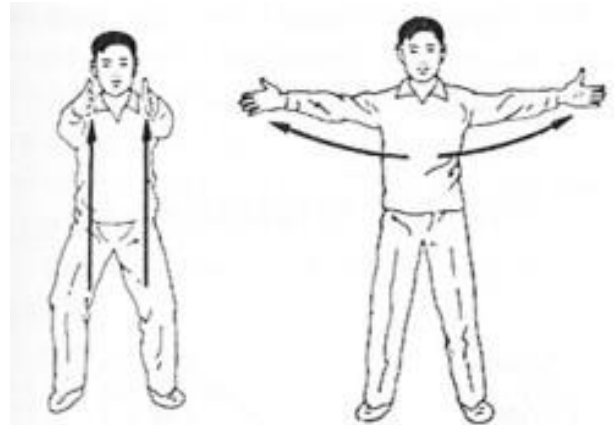
## 2) Opening the chest

Raise arms to shoulders:

- breathe in
- raise body
- draw arms up to shoulder height and width
- elbows and wrists slightly bent
- palms face down

Open arms out:

- turn palms facing each other
- draw hands away from each other
- arms fully extended to sides
- keep elbows slightly bent



Close arms in:

- turn palms facing each other
- breathe out
- draw hands together until shoulder width apart

Return arms to sides:

- turn palms to face the front
- fingers upwards and slightly curved
- sink body down with knees slightly bent
- draw arms down to thighs
- palms face out to backwards

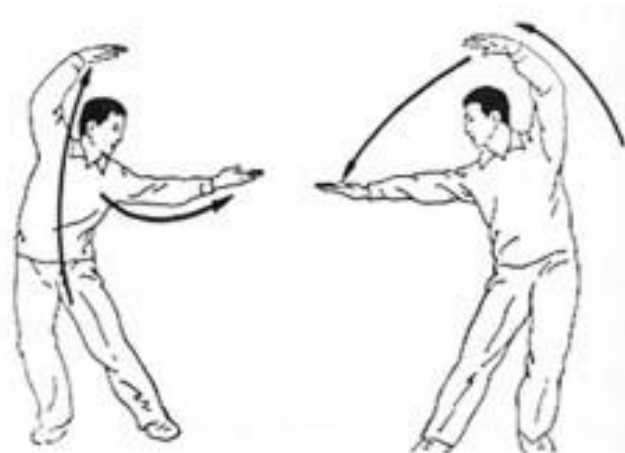
## 3) Painting a rainbow

Raise arms over head:

- breathe in
- raise body
- draw arms straight up fully extended
- turn palms facing each other

Turn to left:

- transfer body weight to right leg
- keep knees slightly bent
- extend left arm out to left side at shoulder height
- left palm up
- turn head to left
- eyes focus on extended left palm
- slightly curve waist over towards extended palm
- curve right arm over head
- right palm faces down above centre of head



Turn to right:

- breathe out transfer body weight to the centre and repeat to opposite side.
- repeat moving from side to side.



#### 4) Separating the clouds

Cross hands:

- turn palms so that they face up
- fingers facing front
- cross hands right over left at wrist

Raise palms:

- breathe in
- raise body slightly
- raise the arms until palms at chest level

Turn palms:

- keep wrists crossed
- turn palms to face downwards
- raise arms above head

Separate hands:

- breathe out
- draw hands apart
- arms fully extended up and out
- keep elbows slightly bent
- keep shoulders relaxed



#### 5) Repulse the monkey

Turn to right:

- turn body from waist toward right
- keep knees slightly bent
- breathe in
- draw right arm down to side
- elbows and wrists are slightly bent

Arc backwards right:

- draw right arm up in an arc behind body
- turn right palm to face the front

Push right palm:

- turn body from waist back to centre
- breathe out
- push right hand over left palm
- draw left arm towards body

Turn to left:

- turn body from waist toward left
- keep knees slightly bent
- breathe in
- draw left arm down to side
- elbows and wrists are slightly bent

Arc backwards left:

- draw left arm up in an arc behind body
- turn left palm to face the front

Push left palm:

- turn body from waist back to centre
- breathe out
- push left hand over right palm
- draw right arm towards body





## 6) Rowing the boat

Raise arms over head:

- pull both arms back
- palms face backwards
- breathe in
- raise body
- draw arms up fully extended above head
- elbows slightly bent
- palms face out to the front

Return arms to sides:

- breathe out
- fingers upwards and slightly curved
- sink body down; knees slightly bent
- draw arms down to thighs
- palms face out to backwards



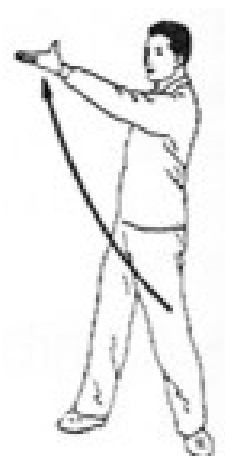
## 7) Holding a ball

Turn left:

- turn body from waist toward left
- breathe in
- extend right arm up until shoulder height
- right palm face up
- raise the right heel

Lower heels:

- lower heel to floor
- breathe out
- turn right palm downwards
- sink body down with knees slightly bent
- turn body from waist back to centre
- draw right arm down to thigh



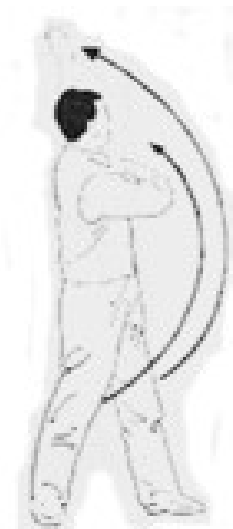
Repeat to the opposite side

## 8) Carrying the moon

Imagine that you have a big balloon between your hands and you turn to look at the moon over your shoulder and then you lower your arms and turn to look over the other shoulder

Turn left:

- breathe in, raise body slightly
- turn body from waist towards the left
- fully extend both arms up and toward left, keep elbows soft
- relax shoulders, elbows and wrists, turning head to look at left palm.





- relax shoulders, elbows and wrists
- turn head to look at left palm

Face front from left:

- breathe out
- turn body from waist back to center
- sink body down with knees slightly bent
- draw arms down and front in line with thigh
- palms facing each other hip width apart

Repeat to the opposite side.

### **9) Twisting waist and pushing hands**

Draw palms to the waist, facing upwards

- turn right palm facing forwards
- turn body from waist toward left
- breathe out
- push right hand to left at 45 degree and up to chest level

Return to center:

- turn right palm facing upwards
- turn body from waist back to center
- breathe in
- draw right hand to waist at right side

Repeat to other side



### **10) Playing with the clouds**

Raise left arm to face level, palm facing body

Drop right hand to waist level, palm facing body

Turn to left:

- turn body from waist toward left
- breathe in
- allow arms to follow turn

Switch positions of your arms:

- raise right arm to face level, palm facing body
- drop left hand to waist level, palm facing body
- keep elbows slightly curved, sweep body around to the right.

Continue to sweep gently from right to left.





## 11) Scooping the Sea

Left foot half step forward

Bend forwards:

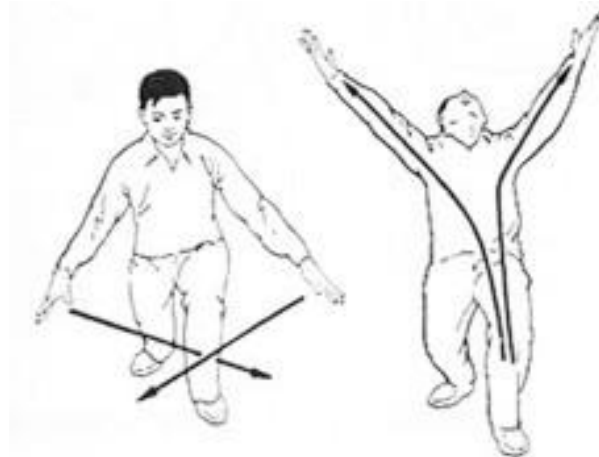
- transfer weight to left foot
- bend at waist drawing both arms downwards and towards left knee
- cross hands over left knee
- palms face upwards

Scoop up:

- transfer weight to right leg
- gradually straighten body upright
- breathe in
- bring crossed palms up above your head

Separate hands:

- separate and extend arms out and down
- palms face the ground
- breathe out



Complete X 6 to the left and then change feet positions, and repeat 6 X to the right

## 12) Pushing the waves

Left foot half step forward

Push hands:

- place both hands at chest level
- palms face the ground
- push both hands out and up
- transfer weight to left foot
- right heel leaves the ground
- breathe out

Pull hands back:

- palms face the ground
- pull back both hands to chest level
- breathe in
- transfer weight from left foot to right



Complete X 6 to the left and then change feet positions, and repeat 6 X to the right

## 13) Spreading your wings

With both arms extended at the end of the last move, turn palms to face each other

Open arms:

- open both arms
- step back with right foot and take half step forwards on left foot
- left heel should be the only part of the left foot that is touching the ground





- breathe in

Close arms:

- close both arms until shoulder width apart
- transfer weight from right foot to left
- right heel lifts as you breathe out

Complete X 6 to the left and then change feet positions, and repeat 6 X to the right

#### **14) Punching**

Bring your left leg back to its original position and draw in both fists to the waist

Left punch out:

- breathe out
- punch out to chest level
- as you punch turn the fist-palm down

Pull left fist back:

- breathe in
- draw left fist back to waist
- as you pull back turn the fist-palm up

Right punch out

Alternate between sides, repeating 6 X each arm.



#### **15) Flying like a goose**

Raise heels:

- breathe in
- raise body
- raise both arms up until slightly above shoulder level
- palms face the ground
- elbows slightly bent
- raise both heels weight on the ball of each foot

Lower heels:

- breathe out
- lower heels to ground
- sink body
- curve both arms downwards

Repeat X 6



#### **16) Spinning wheels**

Circle clockwise up:

- keep your arms shoulder width apart
- bend down
- breathe in

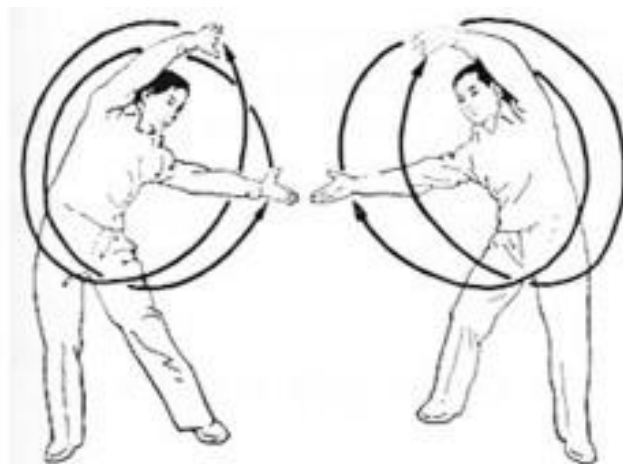


- raise body by twisting to the left
- raise arms until above the head
- gently tilt body backward

Circle clockwise down:

- lower both arms on the right side
- breathe out
- lower body by twisting to the right
- bend down to original position

Repeat X 3 clockwise, and X3 anti-clockwise



### 17) Bouncing ball

Raise body and bring arms to sides of body

Right bounce up:

- shift the weight to right foot
- breathe in
- raise right arm to chest height
- raise left knee until parallel with ground
- bounce once on the right foot

Right bounce down:

- bring down right arm
- put left toes down then left heel down

Left bounce up:

- shift the weight to left foot
- breathe out
- raise left arm to chest height
- raise right knee until parallel with ground
- bounce once on the left foot

Alternate sides X 3 on each side



### 18) Pressing the palms

Raise chi:

- breathe in
- raise body
- turn palms facing upwards
- gently raise arms up until palms facing your nose

Ground chi:

- breathe out
- turn palms downwards
- draw arms down to waist level
- sink body

Repeat 6 times.





## References

<https://www.taichiexercises.co.uk/benefits-of-tai-chi-research-and-citations/>

Thanks to; [www.taichi18.com](http://www.taichi18.com) for kindly sharing their images