

5 Tai Chi Exercises to Improve Balance and Reduce Stress After Stroke

February 13, 2017



You've probably heard of tai chi before.

But have you heard of tai chi *for stroke recovery* before?

Either way, you're in for a treat today. We're going to discuss the basics of tai chi and then move onto 5 [full body exercises](#) that you can incorporate into your stroke recovery regimen today.

We recommend it as a warm-up and closer for your [existing rehab exercise regimen](#).

What Is Tai Chi?

Tai chi is a low-impact, slow-motion exercise that involves a soft flow through a series of motions named after animal actions. While animal actions may sound fierce or intense (or maybe even strange), tai chi tones them down and recreates the movements at a slow, fluid pace.

According to Harvard Health,

“Tai chi is often described as ‘meditation in motion,’ but it might as well be called ‘meditation in motion.’

There is growing evidence that this mind-body practice, which originated in China as a martial art, has value in treating or preventing many health problems. And you can get started even if you aren’t in top shape or the best health.” Other sources explain that tai chi is great for reducing stress, improving balance, and promoting inner peace.

Sounds promising for everyone, including stroke recovery, right? Absolutely!

Energy Is the Essence

Each movement during tai chi involves manipulating the energy around your body. It helps to visualize this energy as you move. During tai chi, you will use your hands to pull and push energy up, down, and around you. Often, it will look like you’re holding an invisible ball.

Tai chi is relaxing and soothing and *sloooow*. Because of that, the practice is very meditative in nature, which is why it’s great for reducing stress. As you practice tai chi, you may get ‘lost’ in the movement – and it’s a great feeling to have.

Tai Chi for Stroke Recovery

Tai chi is particularly difficult to perform without video instruction. So if you’d like visual instruction, you can head over to [FlintFit](#) and watch these exercises in video format. Each exercise is guided by one of our favorite therapist, Barbara, who first introduced us tai chi for stroke recovery. She seems to be everyone else’s favorite too – so we know you’ll like her videos!

Now, let’s get into the written exercises.

1. Warm-Up Flow

Start in a standing position with your legs hip width apart and knees slightly bent.

Then, with your arms shoulder width apart, palms down, and hands 3-6 inches apart, float your hands up and down in front of your body. As you do this, visualize yourself moving a ball of energy up and down with your hands.

2. Snake in the Grass

Then, visualize yourself carrying that big ball of energy (about the size of a large medicine ball) right in front of your torso. Then, while using your arms to carry that ball of energy, pivot your torso to move the ball around in front of you in the shape of an infinity sign (a sideways figure 8).

As you move the imaginary ball to your right, pivot your torso to the right as well. Then repeat on the left side. Keep in mind that this exercise involves your core and entire body, not just your arms.

Move slowly and intentionally as you swirl this energy around the front-side of your body.

The 66/33 Rule:

Each time you shift your body weight from one side to the other – like in this Snake in the Grass exercise – focus on putting 66% of your bodyweight into that side of the body while keeping 33% of your body weight on your other side. Alternate back and forth, always keeping your body weight split 66%/33% on each side.

3. Rising Sun

While smoothly transitioning from the exercise above, take that ball of energy and bring it up in front of your face. Move this energy in an arc from side to side, like a rising and setting sun. This posture will be used as a transition movement for other exercises.

4. Scooping Water

Use your right arm to scoop a big armful of water into your chest. Make a big, slow, circular motion as you scoop the water. Then, bring that water up to your face and around over to your right side, and then bring it down, letting the water fall to the floor.

This movement should feel like one big circular movement for your right arm. Repeat on your left side, and then perform 4 repetitions of this Scooping Water movement on each side.

5. Beautiful Bird

(Note: This is a complex full body movement. So if you'd like to watch Barbara guide you through it, head over to [FlintFit](#).)

Now, imagine that there's a ball of energy on your right shoulder. Pivot your torso and slightly turn to your right as you use your left arm to roll the ball down your shoulder and down your arm.

Then, while you're still facing your right side, shift your weight into your left leg (remember the 66/33 Rule) and bring your hands out to your sides. Keep your arms bent at 90 degrees and keep your upper arm in towards you sides. This posture should resemble a bird in motion.

Then shift forward into your right side to complete the movement. Then, transition to your left side while performing a Rising Sun on your way. Remember to move slowly and fluidly.

Keep your breath in mind as you perform this movement. Inhale as you shift back and spread your wings, and exhale as you shift forward.

The most important focus during this exercises (and all others) are ease, fluidity, and softness in the body.

Free Tai Chi for Stroke Recovery Videos

We hope these tai chi exercises help restore a sense of ease and balance in your body and mind.

If you have trouble following these written instructions, our tai chi videos are available on FlintFit for free by [signing up for a free trial](#).