



Tai Chi Newsletter

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Practicing tai chi & qigong during the winter



As we move into winter, and the darker nights draw in, I thought I would share some thoughts on tai chi & qigong practice at this time of year.

Practicing tai chi & qigong during the winter months can be a grounding, energizing way to stay in tune with your body and mind as the seasons change. In winter, nature slows down, and we feel the pull to retreat inward, often feeling less active and more reflective. tai chi & qigong naturally align with this seasonal rhythm, offering warmth, balance, and energy at a time when it is easy to feel the weight of colder, darker days.

Warming from Within

The gentle, flowing movements of tai chi & qigong generate an internal warmth that counters the chill of winter. While we might be tempted to stay bundled up and sedentary, these practices encourage circulation, gently warming muscles, joints, and even the deeper energy centres. The breath work that accompanies each movement amplifies this warmth, spreading heat and vitality throughout the body—kindling an inner fire that wards off winter stiffness.

Building Immunity and Vitality

Winter is a time when our immune systems can be more vulnerable. tai chi & qigong, with their focus on slow, mindful movement and breathing, help stimulate the lymphatic system and encourage blood flow, which are both essential to immunity. This boost not only keeps the body resilient against seasonal illnesses but also provides an energetic lift that fights winter fatigue and lethargy. When practiced consistently, the natural Qi flow fostered by Tai chi & qigong keeps the body's defences strong and energy levels steady.

Nurturing Calm and Resilience

The winter months are quieter, a time when we might naturally turn inward. Tai chi & qigong tap into this introspective energy, providing a calm, centred space for reflection. The meditative aspects of these practices cultivate peace and mental clarity, allowing us to process the year, let go of tension, and build resilience for the season ahead. Moving with the breath, focusing on each shift in balance, and feeling the grounded energy of each stance all offer a retreat from the rush and noise of daily life—a grounding counterpoint to winter's stillness.

Encouraging Flexibility and Fluidity

It is common in winter to feel a little more rigid, not only physically but mentally and emotionally as well. The slow, continuous flow of Tai chi & qigong loosens up the body, gently working out the stiffness that can settle in colder weather. These practices encourage flexibility not just in our muscles and joints but also in our mindset. We become more adaptable, less prone to winter sluggishness, and more connected to our bodies and emotions.

Balancing Yin and Yang

Winter, in Chinese philosophy, is seen as a time of Yin energy—cool, dark, quiet, and introspective. tai chi & qigong offer a balanced way to work with this energy, not by opposing it but by gently introducing the warmth and vitality of Yang energy. Through these practices, we maintain our inner equilibrium, harmonizing with the Yin energy of winter while also sustaining our personal fire, so that we emerge from the season with balance, vitality, and clarity.

In essence, tai chi & qigong are a beautiful answer to winter's call, helping us stay active yet calm, warm yet grounded, and connected to our own natural rhythm even in the quiet depth of the season.



Tai Chi – Breath, Connect, and Flow.

Regardless of whether your focus is on tai chi as a martial art or health exercise, the form and function are the same. It is an art of mind and body, natural flow, and connection.

In Tai Chi, breathing, movement, and mindful awareness are deeply connected. Proper breathing in Tai Chi is typically slow, deep, and coordinated with movements, often following a natural, diaphragmatic pattern that enhances relaxation, focus, and energy flow (or chi).

Here is a breakdown of how they interrelate:

1. Breathing Techniques in Tai Chi

- **Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Also called “belly breathing,” where the breath expands the lower abdomen, allowing for deep oxygen intake and relaxation.
- **Inhale-Exhale Coordination:** Movements in tai chi are often matched with breathing rhythms, usually inhaling when movements open or rise and exhaling as they close or lower. This synchrony supports a meditative focus and aligns physical and mental states.
- **Continuous Breath:** Like the flow of movements, breathing is ideally continuous and smooth, promoting a calm, unbroken sense of rhythm that helps maintain concentration.

2. Mindful Movement and Learning

- **Presence with Each Movement:** Mindfulness in tai chi means being fully present in each posture and movement, feeling the sensations in the body, and staying grounded in the present moment. This awareness can make each practice a learning experience, refining both mind and body coordination.
- **Listening to the Body:** As you practice, tuning into sensations, balance, and tension allows for adjustments that promote alignment and fluidity, fostering a deeper understanding of the form.
- **Mindful Repetition:** tai chi often emphasizes practicing forms repeatedly with full attention, allowing each session to deepen understanding and muscle memory.

3. Integrating Breathing and Mindfulness in Tai Chi

- **Learning Through Relaxation:** Relaxation, rather than tension, aids in mastering the form. The more relaxed the breath, the more easily movements flow, which in turn makes it easier to absorb techniques.
- **Focus on Process Over Perfection:** Mindful learning in tai chi encourages appreciating gradual improvement. Focusing on each breath and movement without rushing or self-critique builds a steady foundation and reduces stress.
- **Expanding Qi Awareness:** With time, the connection between breath, movement, and energy flow enhances the sense of chi, helping practitioners feel and guide energy smoothly through each part of the form.

This synergy of breathing, movement, and mindfulness in tai chi turns each practice session into a holistic experience, promoting both physical health and inner peace. Through correct practice a flow state can be achieved. A flow state is a mental state of complete immersion, focus, and enjoyment in an activity. When in flow, people often feel fully engaged, lose track of time, and experience a sense of effortlessness and clarity. Psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, who first introduced the concept, described it as the feeling of being “in

the zone,” where one’s skills perfectly meet the challenge at hand. Entering a flow state can lead to higher productivity, creativity, and skill development. Because it creates a positive, deeply engaging experience, flow is often associated with improved well-being and satisfaction, making it valuable for activities like Tai Chi, sports, art, and even work.

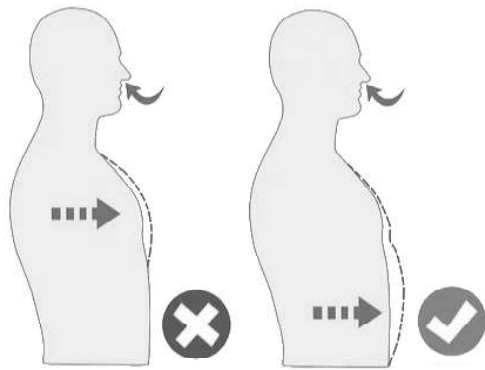


And Breathe.

It’s just a simple thing we do every day and yet can impact our lives so much. Although it’s a simple operation we do naturally, very often we can find we are not breathing at our optimum level. When we are born we breathe correctly as we don’t know how to breathe any other way. Watch a baby as it sleeps and it will naturally breathe through its nose and using the diaphragm to breathe. When training in tai chi & qigong we breathe the same way, breathing in through the nose and breathing out through the nose although some schools breathe in through the nose and out of the mouth. Even though I have tried to research the reasons for using the mouth, but the stock reply is ‘because my teacher taught me this way’ which is not much like science is it?

Some people have difficulty nose breathing but unless you have a physical injury to your nose most people can, but it is necessary to keep using your nose for breathing, ‘use or lose’. To open the nostrils breathe out and empty the lungs of air. Pinch the nose and hold your breath until you feel the need to breathe, gently breathing in through the nose. It may be necessary to do this several times to clear. The nostrils will probably not be equally open as there are only two times in 24 hrs they are. Normally one nostril is more open than the other and they switch approximately every 2 hrs during a day. There is a type of yoga practiced called Swara yoga which is based on the opening of the nostrils.

As well as nose breathing, we should also breathe from our diaphragm as it gives better breathing efficiency leading to better Oxygen uptake, helps to lower the heartbeat rate and normalise blood pressure. A simple exercise to practice diaphragmatic is to sit or lay relaxed, place one hand on the centre of the chest and the other on the stomach. As you inhale the stomach should rise gently and the chest may only rise slightly at the end of the breath intake. The breath should be relaxed and not a forced breath like one normally does if the doctor asks you to take a deep breath. A deep breath is when you gently breathe in unforced using the diaphragm and through the nose. A big breath is normally forced into the lungs through the mouth until you cannot expand your chest any more. In fact the gentle way of breathing actually gets more Oxygen into the body even though this might seem counter intuitive.



Breathing in through the nose has many benefits compared to the mouth as the nose produces Nitric Oxide in the sinus areas and this is received by the lungs on the in breath. Nitric Oxide is a vasodilator which dilates blood vessels to aid reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease and this was the original development aim of Viagra. Nitric Oxide is involved in many bodily functions, including immune response, neurotransmission, enhancing memory and learning, and even improving athletic performance.

Mouth breathing has many negative effects on the body including causing dehydration, bad breath and tooth decay among other things.

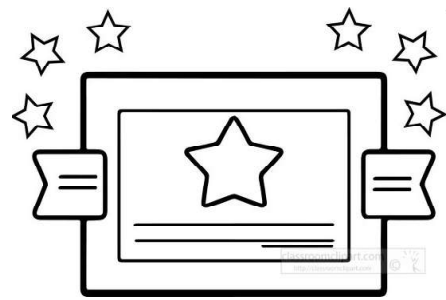
During tai chi (and everyday life) we can use breathing to enhance our immune system but often you need to encourage people to relearn their breathing. Just like we often unlearn correct ways of lifting, we often do the same with breathing. Our nervous system is divided into the Sympathetic nervous system which is often labelled as the 'Fight or Flight' which is our safety net when under duress or in danger. When the 'Fight or Flight' kicks in our bodies will shut down unnecessary body functions to ensure we have maximum resources directed to protect ourselves from danger e.g the blood will move to your muscles to allow you to run etc. Respiration and heart rate increases and the immune system will slow down as the body decides its not required at this time.

When we breathe slowly and relax our 'Fight or Flight' nervous system calms down, your blood distributes more evenly, returning to the bodies organs, respiration, heart rate and blood pressure reduces. This is the Parasympathetic (rest and respite) nervous system kicking in and the immune system is restored.

During practice you should slow the breathing until it is, soft, silent and smooth. Practice until the breath rate becomes easy and relaxed. If you slow it too much you will soon know as you will start to struggle for breath and might start coughing. Remember to allow the stomach to rise gently as the diaphragm moves and relax the breath. It is important to allow the breath to lead and the movement of the body to follow the pace of your breathing to ensure the 'Rest and Respite' side of the nervous system is active to ensure stimulating the immune system.

Practicing Light, Slow and Deep breathing to make it a regular habit will not only improve your Tai chi practice but will also improve your general health.

By Dave Moore – junior instructor, Tamworth



Dedicated Student Award

In the May 2023 newsletter, we mentioned the sad loss of Andrew McAuley (Mac) who was a long-term student. Before he died, he asked if we could start a Dedicated Student award as tai chi had given him so much in his life. The feedback from students and instructors has been excellent and the awards in '23 and '24 well deserved.

We have received nominations for individuals and even a nomination for a group this year. All will be announced in our next newsletter along with photos 😊



How to be Happy in 18 Easy Steps

1. Realise that great love and great achievements involve great risk.
2. When you lose, don't lose the lesson.
3. Follow the 3 Rs: Respect for self, Respect for others, Responsibility for you actions.
4. Remember that not getting what you want is often a stroke of luck!
5. Learn the rules so you know how to break them properly!
6. Don't let a little dispute injure a great relationship.
7. When you make a mistake, move to correct it immediately.
8. Spend some time alone every day.
9. Open your arms to change but don't let go of your values.
10. Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer.
11. Live a good, honourable life. Then when you get older and think back, you'll enjoy it a second time.
12. A loving atmosphere at home is the foundation of your life.
13. In disagreements with loved ones, deal only with the current situation. Don't bring up the past.
14. Share your knowledge. It is a way to achieve immortality.
15. Be gentle with the earth.
16. Once a year, go somewhere you've never been before.
17. Remember that the best relationship is one in which your love for each other exceeds your need for each other.
18. Judge your success by what you had to give up in order to achieve it.

"Good Karma" advice for life by the Dalai Lama.

A Students Journey

I was recently asked to provide some words for the newsletter. I will be honest I have read the recent newsletters, and I totally relate to each contribution.

For me, I guess what I take away from it is that tai chi has many parts to it, and it is a journey. Everyone's journey is different. Each will have their own pace and their own interests in terms of the martial art, the relaxation, and the physical and mental exercise.

My journey began some 18 months ago. I had heard of tai chi but, call it a New Year's resolution, I decided to look up where the classes were being held and join. I haven't looked back. Every lesson brings new knowledge and more details of how to move and manage your balance.

As someone who doesn't dance it can be a challenge to learn the moves. But with the aid of U Tube and some practice at home, I get there. Once you have understood the moves and you do some practice you start to develop muscle memory and you become relaxed.

What do I get out of it? Well, the movements are exercise, which help me relax and improve my day-to-day range of movement, strength and balance. The Chi-Kung (qigong) brings relaxation and develops my Chi (I'm still working on that).

As for the future, I am interested in stepping up to two classes a week and being able to do the CMC 37 form to a good level. I did go to the weekend camp and learned the further 18 moves of the lower hand form, which was great. The moves just seemed to be a natural progression of the form. I look forward to practicing these movements straight on from the CMC 37.

I am also interested in exploring developing Chi-Kung and my Chi, as this seems to be so much a part of tai chi.

See you on the journey !

Geoff Nash - Wednesday Evening Class at St Editha's Tamworth

Q&A on Tao of Tai Chi Chuan.

By Master Huang Sheng Shyan

Question: How many times must we practice the set movements every day?

Answer: The important principle is moderation. The practicing technique must be correct in the first place. Some people say you must practice the whole set of movements ten times a day with one set lasting about 25 minutes. This only focuses on quantity and is wasting Chi and energy. It is contrary to the basic principles of Tai Chi succeeding in only making you sweat and reducing weight. It is not beneficial to the development of



the internal force, internal organs or generally the body internally.

Grandmaster Cheng Man Ching has said, "I practice the mobilization of the internal force and chi using the 37 basic movements every day. One set of movement lasts only 7 minutes". Practicing too much or too little is subject to whether it is practiced correctly or not. Utilizing my experience and following my practicing technique, students are encouraged to practice every morning and evening using about 5 minutes to practice a particular movement or posture (dividing each of them into 2 parts) over and over again. Those students who do so are likely to succeed.

The key to correct practice is the question 'for what purpose' for purpose gives intention. Sometimes you might practice 1 movement and apply what you are learning from the loosening exercises, another time you might practice 1 movement and focus on the transition to the next.

I remember a sign my old boss had at work (engineering company) which read "we never have time to do it right but always have to find time to put it right". Or even the old adage "right first time". You should always practice with diligent attention otherwise; it is just a waste and an empty dance no matter how graceful it may seem. Tai Chi is and should be enjoyable, diligent practice every day will always add to that enjoyment.



Advanced monthly training sessions.

Sessions are held each month for 3 hours at Weoley Hill Village Hall, Bournville, to enable instructors time for their own training and for more advanced students to gain the time to develop a deeper understanding of the application of tai chi chuan.

Sessions are Sunday's 9.30-12.30 at £35 per person from February 2025

Training sessions in 2025

Feb 16th
March 16th
April 13th
May 11th
June 8th
July 6th
Aug 10th
Sept 7th – 9.30am to 4pm – Just the Sunday this year
Oct 12th
Nov 16th

Grading day is planned for February 2025