

Tai Chi FAQs

Q. What is Tai Chi?

A. Tai Chi is short for Tai Chi Ch'uan. The most literal translation of this is "supreme ultimate fist". But, it can also be translated, "Grand Movement". Tai Chi is "grand" because it combines fluid movements and breathing to bring about many wonderful benefits. Tai Chi was originally codified in the Chen Village in China. It combines

- Movements of the Shaolin Temple Monks
- Philosophy of the Tao
- Theory of yin and yang
- Principles of the movement of energy/chi

Q. What is Chi?

A. Simply put, chi is energy. Think of the power of rushing water that can be harnessed for electricity. Or think of the power of a hurricane force wind that can blow down buildings. This chi energy is found in nature in all things that move—including the human body. It isn't magical or mystical. But it is powerful. By moving our bodies, we increase our chi.

Q. Will this help my balance? My doctor suggested I take it.

A. Tai Chi has been proven to help with balance as well as provide many other benefits, but not because it is magic or mystical in any way. It helps with balance because it forces us to use muscles in ways that we don't in our day-to-day lives. The shifting, fluid movements of Tai Chi strengthen those muscles that are used to hold us upright, as well as shifting weight and balance.

Q. I have a bad ____ (back, knees, shoulder. . .), can I still do Tai Chi?

A. Of course, you should always ask your doctor before you undertake any exercise program. But, bad knees, shoulders, back are actually good reasons to begin a program like Tai Chi. The gentle movements are easy on the joints, and most of the movements can be modified to accommodate your needs. In class, if something hurts, don't do it.

Q. Do I need special clothes/shoes/equipment?

A. Nothing special. A pair of flat-soled sneakers (like Keds) or flexible shoes (like Naturalizer), comfortable clothes, an open mind and willing spirit are all it takes to get started.

Q. I have trouble getting my hands and feet to work together.

A. Doing Tai Chi can be a little like rubbing your tummy and patting your head at the same time. It looks easy, but feels awkward when you begin. Be patient with yourself. Cultivate "beginners mind". As adults we are used to doing things

that are already in our "skill-set". In Tai Chi, we are all beginners. There is nothing else that we do that is like it. So, just let yourself be a beginner.

Q. I'm doing it wrong.

A. At a seminar led by one of the 4 living grandmaster of Chen Tai Chi, Grandmaster Chen XioWang remarked: "There is no perfect tai chi, only less error." Tai Chi is a life-long practice. There are good days and bad days, days when it feels great and days when it is a chore, days when all the pieces come together and days when it feels like you are all hands and feet. But, keep at it. Persevere and accept that there is always more to learn, always more to add to your understanding.

Q. Everyone else seems to be getting it—I don't want to hold up the rest of the class.

A. People learn in different ways at different paces. There is no expectation that the whole class will "get it" in the same way and at the same pace. In class, I'll demonstrate every move, break it down into little pieces, and we'll practice it until you get it. My promise to you: if you come to class, you will get it. The only people who don't get it are the ones who don't come.

Q. How do I practice at home?

A. There is no wrong way to practice. You can do the standing breathing, or the warm-up exercises, or the parts of the form you remember. Anything you do at home will add to your improvement and enjoyment. But it is not required. I will not be checking or asking if you practiced. There are no extra points for at home practice—only increased benefit.

Q. I can't remember the moves when I get home.

A. Don't worry—it will come. Tai Chi is challenging at every level: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. Trying to remember the moves is a mental challenge. The good news is that learning something new, and struggling to remember the steps is good for your brain! It develops new neurons and helps your brain to be healthy in all areas of your life. And, even if you practice and you know it isn't exactly the way you did it in class, we can address it in the next class.

Q. How long will it take me learn Tai Chi?

A. The Beginner form is divided into 4 manageable sections. Each section gets progressively harder. So, as you get better, the moves are more challenging. It takes most people at least 6 classes to learn the first few moves. The entire beginner form can take much longer. Most people take a year or more to learn the whole form. So, relax. Be patient with yourself. There's no hurry. The process is the practice.