

PRINCIPLES OF TAI CHI

1. Did you know that the principles of Tai Chi are developed around our centre of gravity and engaging our deep core/postural muscles? We start with the principle of **circular and spiralling movement**. This principle speaks of continuous and flowing movement; inwardly in terms of our Chi being cultivated, and moved throughout our body, and outwardly, with the side-to-side and circular movement of our hips, torso and other joints, we propagate centripetal and centrifugal power. Moving with natural propulsion saves us energy. When we move against our natural flow, this expends more energy and leads to weariness and pain syndromes.
2. The second principle of Tai Chi is **slowness and timing**. When we are new to Tai Chi, it can be confusing as to how fast/slow to go, and when to stop one form (movement) and when to progress to the next. Also, different styles have a faster or slower pace. With practice your body develops a sense of timing. That is, when to flow from one form into the next. You will know when this starts to happen. You could call it muscle memory. It is a tangible compulsion that feels almost spiritual. This is the Chi flowing through your body. Once you start to sense this, yield to it and enter a state of peacefulness and mental calm. Practice the form at your own pace, relaxed, free of apprehension, and allow your Chi to guide you.
3. The third principle of Tai Chi is **Sung** (soong). Totally relax each and every joint and part of our body and mind, releasing all tension and letting it fall toward the ground. As we move and contact the ground there should be no tension. Our centre of gravity is lower than normal. The clearing or emptying of thoughts from our mind is called **Jing**. You are conscious of your thoughts but allow them to be still, while your joints are being mentally stretched and loosened from within.
4. The 4th principle of Tai Chi is **rooting**. Practicing tai chi static poses will develop balance and allow you to feel your body weight sinking down, focusing on your **lower dantien** (point 3 cun (thumb) widths below your navel and approximately 2 cun into the abdominal cavity. Your upper body feels weightless while your lower body and feet melt into the surface of the earth/floor and support your body as if your legs and feet were the roots of a tree. Practice uprooting one leg, "replanting" it, and then the other. Don't rise up – stay down while you do this. Keep relaxed and go slow to allow your body to experience the sinking.
5. The 5th principle of Tai Chi is **centrifugal and centripetal waist power**. The waist governs all movements in tai chi. The waist directs the rooting power from the earth through the lower body, to the upper

body and uses that power to create centrifugal and centripetal force when rotating the torso side to side. This action calls upon our stores of Chi from our Dantien powerhouse. We can sense this energy in our palms and fingers when our movements and chi (power) become one. Your waist should move a half second before the rest of your body.

6. The 6th principle of Tai Chi - **Uniting The Lower And Upper Body**. When lower and upper body are united, we experience a natural propulsion or pathway for energy and power to flow. Smooth coordination of body movement from the soles of our feet (behind the pads – K1 acupoint) through the thighs, governed by the waist and manifesting in the hands and fingers leads to unity between our lower and upper body. Ideally, the hips and waist should move a half second ahead of the upper body, and this action massages our thoracic diaphragm and internal organs. Legs are co-ordinated with arms, elbows with hips, feet with hands. Our centre of gravity shifts with every hand movement, and movement of the arm must be initiated from the centre of the body. When movement is jerky, the torque power from this countermovement is lost and Chi does not flow freely, and we will feel off-balance.
7. The [7th Principle of Tai Chi](#) is **Connection**. Movement starts at our feet, energy flows upward through our legs, which moves our waist, our ribcage, and flows outward to our arms and finally our hands. One connection may appear more noticeable than the rest sometimes – e.g. our left foot or leg to our left arm or hand. Or sometimes the opposite arm or hand. Just like music has rhythm and melody, smooth coordination and timing of our movements maintains connection from one articulating muscle group to the next. Connection should feel effortless and flowing.
8. The 8th principle of Tai Chi is **avoiding double-weightedness**. Much is lost in translation into English with this term, and it gets more technical than what is needed here. These principles come with much practice. From a beginner perspective, when doing the tai chi movements, which involve constant transfer of weight, we are advised to have more weight on one leg than the other. This is usually 70/30, or 100% - as when we kick, and all our weight is on one leg. Another example is empty-step, a commonly used transitional move, where 100% of our weight is on one leg and the other leg is left "hanging". Here we are introduced to the concepts of "empty" (insubstantial) and "full" (substantial). The leg we stand on is "full" taking 100% of our weight, while the leg that has no weight on the floor is considered "empty". What we want to **avoid** is 50/50 - equal weight (double-weightedness) on both legs while doing movements. (This can also be applied to hands.) This would interrupt natural energy flow, and in doing so, inhibit every other Principle of Tai Chi.

9. The 9th and final Principle of Tai Chi is ***Integration***. Once you have mastered technique, you unlock dormant energetic and spiritual senses that extend beyond your body to your environment, planet, even universe - whatever that means to you. Think energy, spirit, intuition, empathy, tranquility free of negative and intruding thoughts, deep insight and clarity. Tai Chi is truly a mind-body-spirit phenomenon that has to be experienced and accepted to be understood. Wonderfully obscure and spiritual, different for each person.