

Tai Chi for beginners – A basic introduction to the forms

The following hand out aims to give some guidelines to some basic forms and stances used within Shibashi Qigong. Its purpose is to introduce you to Tai Chi at a level which you should feel comfortable and to give you an appreciation of some of the basic forms and principles of the movements. Should you want to further your practice, the Tai Chi Leaflet (<http://www.sdhct.nhs.uk/uploads/taichi.pdf>) on the Reconnect2life website offers website links to help you find local classes. Alternatively you can speak to your Physiotherapist or Exercise Instructor.

Please note: Both standing and seated versions are illustrated. It is up to you to decide in which of these positions you are likely to get the most out of the exercise.

About Tai Chi (Shibashi Qigong)

What is Shibashi Qigong?

Tai Chi can be a dynamic or free flowing form of moving meditation which helps bring about calm and peace of mind whilst gently exercising the whole body and helps to enhance the flow of Qi (vital energy) within the body. Tai Chi is now widely practised and taught in every major country of the world. It's principles and methods make it readily accessible to people of all ages and ability.

Shibashi Qigong (Shibashi meaning 18 movements in Chinese and Qigong is an ancient Chinese system of physical exercises and breathing techniques) was developed through the Yang style that is one of the five traditional Tai Chi styles. Shibashi exercises unify the whole of the system in a relaxed, focused and mindful way, what appears flowing and effortless on the outside is a result of cultivating deep relaxation on the inside. Being mindful of the way we breathe and move, less of what we do becomes an unconscious reaction. This allows us to remain calm and centered and in full control of all we do in life. Gentle Stretching and releasing, combined with deep relaxed breathing encourages tensions deep in the body's tissues to soften and release.

Where to practice

This type of Qigong can be practiced indoors and outdoors. A quiet and peaceful environment should be chosen with good air circulation. Avoid practicing outside at times of severe weather such as thunderstorms or days with high smog alerts and strong winds.

Breathing

When practicing Shibashi Qigong we use a style of breathing called abdominal breathing or diaphragmatic breathing. You inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. It is deep breathing using the full extent of your lung capacity. 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

This Qigong is very effective and easy to learn. However, you should not expect to remember all 18 movements at one time. You should begin by practicing a few movements at a time. When practiced regularly, most people will be able to master all 18 movements within a week. You should start to see some results if you practice this qigong exercise on a daily basis for three months.

How to practice

Shibashi Qigong can be practiced anywhere and in both standing and seated. 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.

1. Commencing form

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your weight spread evenly across both legs. Arms remain relaxed by your side.
- Breathe in
- Raise your arms to shoulder level or a height that feels acceptable. Keep your elbows and wrists relaxed.
- Breathe out
- Lower your arms and wrist in a relaxed manner.



2. Broadening one's chest

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your weight spread evenly across both legs. Arms remain relaxed by your side.
- Breathe in
- Raise your arms to shoulder level or a height that feels acceptable. Keep your elbows and wrists relaxed.
- Breathe out
- With your hands facing together, open your arms out and open the chest. Allow your shoulders to relax.
- Breathe in
- Face your palms towards each other and bring your arms back to the middle. Remember to keep your shoulders relaxed
- Breathe out
- Lower your arms to return to the beginning.



3. Dancing with Rainbows

- Breathe in
- Lift your right arm overhead with your elbow bent and shift your weight to the right hand side. At the same time extend your left arm out straight (the posture resembles an archer ready to fire his bow or a tea pot).
- Breathe in
- In a continuous movement raise your hands overhead and shift your weight to the centre.
- Breathe out.
- Shift your weight across to the left hand side and mirror the form held previously on the right.



4. Circling arms

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your weight spread evenly across both legs. Your arms remain loose and relaxed. Your hands are crossed with your palms facing your body.
- Breathe in
- Raise your arms up your body until your head or as high as you feel is comfortable.
- Breathe out
- Lower your arms in a circling movement to the outside of your body and return to the starting position.



5. Twisting waist and swing arms

- Turn your body at the waist toward your right side and keep your knees slightly bent.
- Breathe in
- With the right arm down at the side of your body, palm facing up, draw your arm back in an arc, lifting your elbow towards shoulder height (or as far as is comfortable).
- Breathe out
- Begin to rotate your wrist so that your palm will face forward. At the same time start bringing your right arm and body weight forward until the right arm is extended in front of you. Think of this move like front crawl in swimming.
- Repeat on your left side (Those who have been practicing for a while will be doing the movements simultaneously with both arms but when beginning it is acceptable to move one side at a time and easier to obtain good quality of movement).



6. Rowing the boat

- Breathe in
- Lift your arms back and overhead. Your palms face forwards.
- Breathe out
- Palms face forwards, push arms forwards and down as if you were rowing a boat.



7. Holding a ball

- Breathe in
- Turn your body from the waist towards the left and reach across with your left arm until shoulder height or as high as feels comfortable.
- Breathe out
- Return to waist and left arm to your starting position. Now turn your body to the right and reach your right arm across like you did on the left hand side.
- Note: The idea of holding a ball is illustrated in the sitting photos to show the form, a ball is not needed for this exercise.



8. Carrying the moon

- Breathe in
- Turn your body towards the left from the waist. Your shoulders are relaxed and your elbows slightly bent. Now reach both arms towards the left with your head focusing on your hands.
- Breathe out
- Bring hands down. Turn to right and repeat.



9. Twisting waist and push palms

- Breathe in
- Draw palms to the waist facing upwards.
- Breathe out
- Turn your body to the left at the waist. Keep the left elbow and wrist slightly bent and the draw the elbow back.
- At the same time: extend the right arm forward and push with the right palm facing forward (as if you are trying to stop traffic).
- Breathe in
- Return to the middle and spread your weight evenly before turning to the right, drawing your left arm back and extending your left arm with your palm facing forward.
- If it helps just practice the movement with one arm at a time before you can co-ordinate both together. Gently shift from side to side and bend your knees.



10. Playing with clouds

- Breathe in
- With your arms relaxed (held out in front as if cradling a baby) and palms facing towards you, turn to your left. Twist at the waist and bring your weight onto your left foot. Your gaze should be directed towards your left hand throughout. Your right hand follows underneath.
- Breathe out
- Rotate back to your original position.
- Breathe in
- Repeat the movement towards your right (This time your right hand will be the furthest from your middle).



11. Scooping from the sea

- Stand with your left foot forward, knee bent and weight shifted slightly toward your left side.
- Breathing in
- Bend down forwards over your left knee and bring your hands together palms facing up.
- Bring your hands up over your head (or as far as is comfortable) whilst slowly separating your arms and transfer your weight onto your right foot.
- Breathe out.
- Separate your arms and bend forward again to scoop from the sea.



12. Playing with waves

- Stand with your left foot forward.
- Breathe in
- Bend your elbows and bring your hands to your shoulders with the palms facing forward. Your weight is on your back leg.
- Breathe out
- Push your arms forward and shift your weight onto your front leg with palms facing forward.
- Breathe in
- With your hands facing down bring your weight back to the middle.



13. Spreading your wings

- Stand with your left foot forward.
- Breathe in
- Reach forward with your arm extended in front of you. Your elbows should be relaxed and slightly bent. Aim for chest height or as high as comfortable with your arms. Your hands face each other. If you feel confident allow your right heel to lift off the floor as you come forward.
- Breathe out
- Move backwards transferring your weight onto your right foot. As you do this separate your arms and spread them back like wings as far as you feel comfortable. Again shoulders are relaxed, elbows slightly bent and palms face forwards.



14. Punching

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your weight spread evenly across both legs. Arms remain relaxed by the side with soft fists.
- Breathe out
- Punch the right arm forward at chest level if possible.
- Breathe in
- Turn wrist over so that your fist faces upwards and draw your arm back to rest by your side.
- Repeat with the left arm.



15. Flying like a wild goose

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your weight spread evenly across both legs .
- Breathe in
- Shift forward slightly to feel the weight of your body through the balls of your feet and lift your arms sideways above your head. Your arms remain relaxed during this movement, your palms begin facing down and your wrists extend until they face away from your body and out to the sides.
- Breathe out
- Lower your arms down the side with wrists up and sink through your knees. You are now flying like a wild goose.



16. Spinning wheels

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your weight spread evenly across both legs. Let your arms lower in front of you, shoulders are relaxed, elbows bent and palms facing each other.
- Breathe in
- Twist the body to the right and reaching out your arms begin making a large circling movement with your palms facing each other to until they are above your head.
- Breathe out
- Lower your arms on the left side of your body keeping the same distance between your hands.



17. Bouncing the ball

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your weight spread evenly across both legs .
- Transfer your weight onto your right foot.
- Breathe in
- Lift your left foot off the ground and your right arm to shoulder height, palm facing down.
- Breathe out
- Slowly drop your foot and arm.
- Repeat on the other side.



18. Pressing the palms

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your weight spread evenly across both legs. Rest your hands on top of each other palms facing up.
- Breathe in
- Raise your hands up to chest height.
- Breathe out
- Turn your hands over to face down and slowly lower your arms.

