

T'ai-Chi Warm-ups

Just as recreational or professional athletes perform warm-ups before their training or events, it is important that we perform warm-up exercises to prepare ourselves for the practice of T'ai-Chi. Warm-up exercises:

- Wake up the body to itself
- Open up and lubricate our joints
- Gently massage our organs
- Stimulate blood and lymph circulation
- Simultaneously relax and strengthen our bodies
- Encourage greater body suppleness

T'ai-Chi warm-up exercises are the first step in deepening our body awareness in preparation for standing meditation and T'ai-Chi. They are more about mobility and range of motion than they are about stretching.

Warm-ups are most effective when we start at the top and work our way down our bodies. Warm-ups release tension and relax our bodies, and it is difficult for our legs and lower back to relax when they are trying to support a tense upper body.

When performing our warm-ups, we do not “bounce” as bouncing stretches our muscles beyond their ability to stretch safely, and therefore can lead to injury. Instead, we like to use circular motion (T'ai-Chi loves circles, arcs, and curves!) whenever possible, which is a safer and more effective way of warming up for the specific practice of T'ai-Chi.

As always, do not perform any one or more of the warm-ups if you experience pain or discomfort. Be especially careful if you are nursing an injury that could be aggravated by any of these exercises. And if you are working with a therapist or any other health care provider, please review the exercises with them before performing the exercises.

The exercises are provided below as a reminder to those who perform these regularly in class.

1. Gently raise your chin up and down.
2. Turn your head side to side.
3. Ear to shoulder, both sides.
4. Rotate your right shoulder back.
5. Rotate your left shoulder back.
6. Rotate both shoulders back.

7. Squeeze your shoulders behind, then in front (when squeezing in front, bring back of hands together).
8. Circle both arms back.
9. Circle just your right arm.
10. Circle just your left arm.
11. Circle your right arm across your front.
12. Gently pull the right elbow in toward you.
13. Circle your left arm across your front.
14. Gently pull that elbow in toward you.
15. Spiral your arms to the side, alternating sides.
16. Spiral your hands in front (back of hands end up facing each other in front).
17. Spiral your hands overhead (again back of hands end up facing each other when overhead).
18. Reach for the sky, hand over hand.
19. Reach for the sky, hand under hand.
20. Gently pull your elbows in toward your head (one elbow at a time).
21. Swing your arms forward.
22. Open your arms arching your back; close your arms (around your front) rounding your back.
23. Swing your arms to the side.
24. Rub your kidneys.
25. Turn to your right, place your right heel out (toe up), lean forward relaxing your abdomen and lower back.
26. Turn to your left, place your left heel out (toe up), lean forward relaxing your abdomen and lower back.

27. Turn to the front, separate your feet a little more than shoulder width, lean forward, again relaxing your abdomen and lower back. When done, bend your knees so you move into a squat and then push up with your legs.
28. Circle at your waist five times each direction.
29. With knees bent, circle your pelvis five times each direction.
30. With knees straight, circle your hips five times each direction.
31. Turn to your right, step forward with your right foot and circle your hips toward your right foot.
32. Gently ease down into a lunge, keeping your rear heel up.
33. Turn to your left, step forward with your left foot and circle your hips toward your left foot.
34. Gently ease down into a lunge, keeping your rear heel up.
35. Turn toward the front, feet together, hang forward relaxing your abdomen and lower back.
36. Loosen up your wrists.

And even though these Qigong-type exercises are done in preparation for T'ai-Chi, they can also be done on their own as a great way to boost your energy levels!