

Tai Chi Blog - by Master Paul

Tai Chi Chuan blog — I creat the blog for recording and sharing my experience of Tai Chi practice. Also I am exercising Chinese Buddha Qigong (Chi Kung) and will share it with you.



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Water tai chi

Slow graceful movement patterns of water tai chi add a new dimension to aqua fitness classes.

Water tai chi is a combination of the principles of water fitness and the graceful flowing movements of tai chi chuan. Incorporating the slow, powerful exercises of this Chinese martial art into your existing aqua program adds a fresh new dimension to classes that enhance not only the body, but the mind and spirit.

Traditional tai chi, which means “supreme ultimate,” has been practiced for six centuries in China. Today it is one of the most practiced exercises in the world. The Chinese perform tai chi for improved health, self defense and spiritual growth. Chi refers to the vital force, or intrinsic energy, that is said to flow through the meridian channels of the body. It is said regular tai chi practice ensures the body’s meridians remain open and flowing with chi.

Water tai chi is performed upright in chest depth water. Its movements can be incorporated into the warm-up, conditioning and cool-down phases of an aquatic class. Many find the exercises improve strength, flexibility, balance, coordination and posture. Additionally, participants develop grace and powerful use of the whole body. On a psychological level, reported benefits include increased vitality and energy, improved focus, relaxation and a sense of well-being.

Participants of all ages can enjoy and appreciate the unique, graceful, and flowing movements of tai chi. The mind-body concepts of the ancient martial art of tai chi chuan combined with the gentle qualities of water exercise attract people looking for alternative ways to de-stress and bring balance to their lives.

Seniors benefit from water tai chi’s emphasis on balance and posture. The Arthritis Foundation, a long time supporter of water exercise, recently stated tai chi may be the ideal exercise for arthritis sufferers. Studies are underway concerning possible uses in treating the elderly for loss of balance and frequent falls.

Body Temperature

Introduce tai chi movements only after thoroughly warming up the body. Cooling can occur quickly with slow movements in typical pool temperatures of 80 to 84 degrees, resulting in chilled, uncomfortable participants. Adding power and speed to the movements or alternating between faster and slower movements can help maintain comfort. Therapy pools with temperatures near 90 degrees favor relaxation and are ideal for water tai chi.

Water Depth

Chest depth water allows for total submergence of arms and provide adequate stabilization of feet. Buoyancy is directly affected by the water's depth For example, a body submerged at rib cage depth weighs about 75% less than it would on land, and approximately 90% less when submerged to the neck Deeper water makes it difficult to overcome the effects of buoyancy.

Aquatic Shoes

Tai chi footwork, including the pivot twist step, side step, and turn back and kick are easier and safer to execute with shoes on. Aquatic shoes improve traction, support and footing, and protect the bottom of the feet. Movements are executed with knees slightly bent, and one or both feet grounded while maintaining a low center of gravity. The objective is to overcome the effects of buoyancy and remain grounded.

Drag and Viscosity

Water tai chi is different from the traditional land version in that the resistive and supportive qualities of water provide an ideal environment for slow, rounded, flowing movements. Water provides about 12 times the resistance of air, so the body naturally moves more slowly in the water due to drag forces.

Drag, the resistance encountered as the body moves through water, increases with the length of the limbs, or levers. A long lever is a fully extended arm or leg, while a short lever is a flexed arm or leg. Water tai chi exercises utilize both short and long levers.

The viscosity of water will naturally slow down a moving body. Viscosity is the friction between molecules of a liquid or gas which causes them to adhere to each other (cohesion) and, in water, to a submerged body (adhesion). Water is more viscous than air, and this friction between molecules is what causes resistance to motion. The effects of drag and viscosity naturally promote the slow motion-like movements of tai chi.

Body Positioning

Attention to posture and breathing is important to proper body positioning. The back is straight with the head held erect. Participants should imagine their head is suspended from above to avoid a stiff vertical posture. Vision should be focused straight ahead, but sometimes follow the movements of the hands. Breathing should be deep and relaxed, with the mind alert and focused. Exhale through the mouth and inhale through the nose in a natural fashion. Joints of the arms should be relaxed, with the shoulders sunk and elbows slightly flexed.

Tai chi is rooted in the feet, issued through the legs, controlled by the waist and expressed through the hands. All of the moves originate from the main energy center in the abdomen, which is called the t'an t'ien (pronounced don chien). Participants work from a low center of gravity, softening the knees and using only the amount of energy needed to execute the movements.

Water tai chi is based on the yang style and chi kung, which consist of more than 100 changing postures and require extensive practice. The aquatic adaptations are much simpler and involve more repetition. Some of the water tai chi movements are true to form, while others are creative adaptations. For example, "Wave hands like clouds," a frequent posture in the yang form, repeats three times while moving laterally to the left.

The water version incorporates the movement numerous times while traveling in both directions. On land, upper body movements like “box both ears,” “raising the chi” and “push hands” are performed with constantly changing leg stances. Interesting upper body movements can accompany a variety of water walking movements like the step and kick front, side step, and step and pivot. Simplification of the complex postures of tai chi enables more students to participate and enjoy.

It helps to use imagery-based commands when leading water tai chi classes. For example, use instructions like “move arms like water flowing from a hose,” “coordinate movements of the whole body like a string of pearls,” move arms as if they were massaging a ball , sink and pivot,” “turn the waist” and “sink and rise like a cat.”

Yin and Yang

Another component of tai chi is the concept of yin and yang, two opposing types of energy. Yin is calm and static, while yang is active and dynamic. Chi flows only when these two forces are in balance. For example, the lower body is firmly grounded to the earth while the upper body moves like clouds in the wind. Tai chi is based on the laws of nature. Many of the movements and postures relate to animals, the sea and the sky. “Parting the Wild Horse’s Mane,” “Repulse the Monkey” and “White Crane Spreads Wings” are some examples.

The early roots of tai chi are steeped in folklore and imagination. It is believed that an ancient Taoist priest had a dream of a rattlesnake and crane in combat, and thus was inspired to create the first movements of tai chi.

WATER TAI CHI MOVEMENTS

The following are some water tai chi movements to incorporate into your aquatic class.

* Chinese Torso Twist

Face forward and bend your knees slightly, standing with your feet firmly anchored three to four inches beyond your shoulder width. Extend both arms out to the side with your elbows and wrists relaxed. Rotate your upper torso while swinging your arms to the left. Keep your feet anchored, and your back and head erect as you rotate back to the right. Inhale and exhale with the movement while contracting your abdominal muscles. Imagine your arms as water flowing from a hose. Repeat 12 times.

* Side Kicks

Stand with your feet, several inches apart and lift both arms out to your sides at shoulder level. Lift your right knee while lowering your arms and bringing them across your chest. Then kick your leg out to the side while extending your arms, positioning the fingertips up and keeping the elbows soft. Lower your arms and leg, bend your knees slightly and repeat with your left leg. Travel forward and then backward for variety. Always keep one foot anchored. Repeat 15 times, alternating legs.

* Embracing the Moon

Face forward with your feet positioned shoulder width apart. Hold your hands as if you were carrying a basketball—one palm up and the other palm down. Begin rotating the imaginary ball in a figure-eight pattern while gradually increasing your range of motion. Keep your elbows soft and your shoulders down. Move the opposite leg like a pendulum while rotating the ball to the side of your anchored leg. Repeat 15 times.

* Wave Hands Like Clouds

Stand with your feet several inches apart and lift your arms to shoulder level. Step laterally with the right foot, and simultaneously circle both arms under and out of the water. The right arm circles clockwise and the left arm counter-clockwise. Repeat four times and then travel left. Repeat entire sequence three times.

* Tai Chi Expressive Hands

Integrate these moves into water walking or deep water classes,

Alternate Push Hands—With elbows sunk, position hands with fingertips up, one palm facing the chest and the other palm facing forward. Imagine pulling taffy.

Box Both Ears—Make two fists with elbows sunk in front of the body. Rotate the palms up while opening hands, and pull them down and behind the body. Open arms out to the side and reposition with fisted hands.

Cross Hands—Position arms crossed in front of the chest as if you were holding a large ball. Slowly lift the arms up while uncrossing them. Open arms out to the side, scoop under the water and return to crossed position with opposite arm in front.

Raise Hands and Push—Position arms in front of body with palms down and elbows sunk. Slowly lift arms to top of head, lower them to chest and push forward. Keep palms facing down until the arms are at chest level.

by Carol Argo

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