
Motivation to Move

Tai Chi Everyday

Judith Jones-Ambrosini

At our Self-Care DARE retreats we start off each day with thirty minutes of tai chi stretches. These movements help loosen us up, awaken our biological engines and sharpen our minds for the activities of the day. Many of the women who attend the retreats have asked for a few simple exercises to do at home. The following is a group of movements that can be done once or several times during the day when you need a few minutes to unwind, relax or chill out.



This handout includes instructions for **FIVE TAI CHI EXERCISES** you can do everyday.

1. **SHAKE LIKE A TREE.** Standing with back straight, arms and legs loose, knees slightly bent, feet hip width apart and firmly grounded. Begin to bounce entire body as though you are a tree shaking its limbs, trunk, branches and leaves, allowing arms to move freely from side to side. Think of yourself as a rag doll, gently shaking and bouncing. Continue for at least one minute. This exercise helps loosen muscles, ligaments and joints as well as stimulate the nervous and circulatory systems. It massages the internal organs and brings fresh blood into tissues It is sometimes called the Tibetan cup of coffee since it stirs up energy (without drinking caffeine).
2. **RAINBOW CIRCLE:** Standing comfortably with arms raised above head as if holding up the heavens, slowly begin to bend at the waist to one side, lowering yourself, head towards the floor while exhaling through the nose. Begin to sweep up the opposite side in a circular motion, inhaling and coming back to starting position. Knees are slightly bent throughout this movement. Go at a moderate pace making large full circles stretching out the waist, ribs and loosening the lower spine. Repeat same circular movement going in the opposite direction. Do this about five times in each direction.
3. **WHITE CRANE SPREADS HER WINGS:** By doing this exercise every day you will improve your balance. At first it may seem awkward but the more you practice it the more improvement you will see. Stand with feet hip distance apart, knees soft. Arms are spread out to the side (horizontally) but

not locked. Focus your gaze on one spot and placing all your weight in one leg, lift the opposite knee up and forward to a ninety-degree position. Don't worry if you can't do this. It takes time. Just lift one leg as much off the floor as is comfortable for you. Hold for a second or two then switch legs and repeat with other leg. Do these three or four times with each leg. When you feel confident with this movement you can flutter your wings (arms) gently as though you are a white crane taking flight. This is a very graceful and rhythmic movement and when practiced on a daily basis will develop concentration and balance.

4. **HIP AND KIDNEY CIRCLES:** Standing with feet rooted and hip distance apart, hands on hips, make wide circles with the hips keeping the upper body still. Breathe in as you circle back and exhale as you move forward, tightening the stomach muscles. This one takes concentration. It is important to keep back straight throughout and exaggerate the hip movement getting a good stretch throughout the pelvic girdle area. Try to do about eight circles in each direction with full range of motion.

5. **KNEE ROTATIONS:** With feet and knees together as closely as you can and hands placed gently above knee caps, gaze down about six feet in front of you and rotate knees in one direction as if burrowing a hole in the floor with your knees. Do this to the count of twenty-five in each direction. You can practice this exercise with small or large circles and at whatever speed feels comfortable. The important part is to circle the knees bringing lubrication into the joints, tendons bones and ligaments. This practice is something like an internal moisturizer plus it helps keep area around knees flexible and strong.

So here it is, your daily tai chi pathway. I can guarantee that if you keep moving and stretching every day you will reap the rewards of a positive attitude, flexibility, less stress, more body awareness and perhaps many days of 100 bg's. Hope to see you at our next Self-Care retreat when we can do these movements together by the stream.