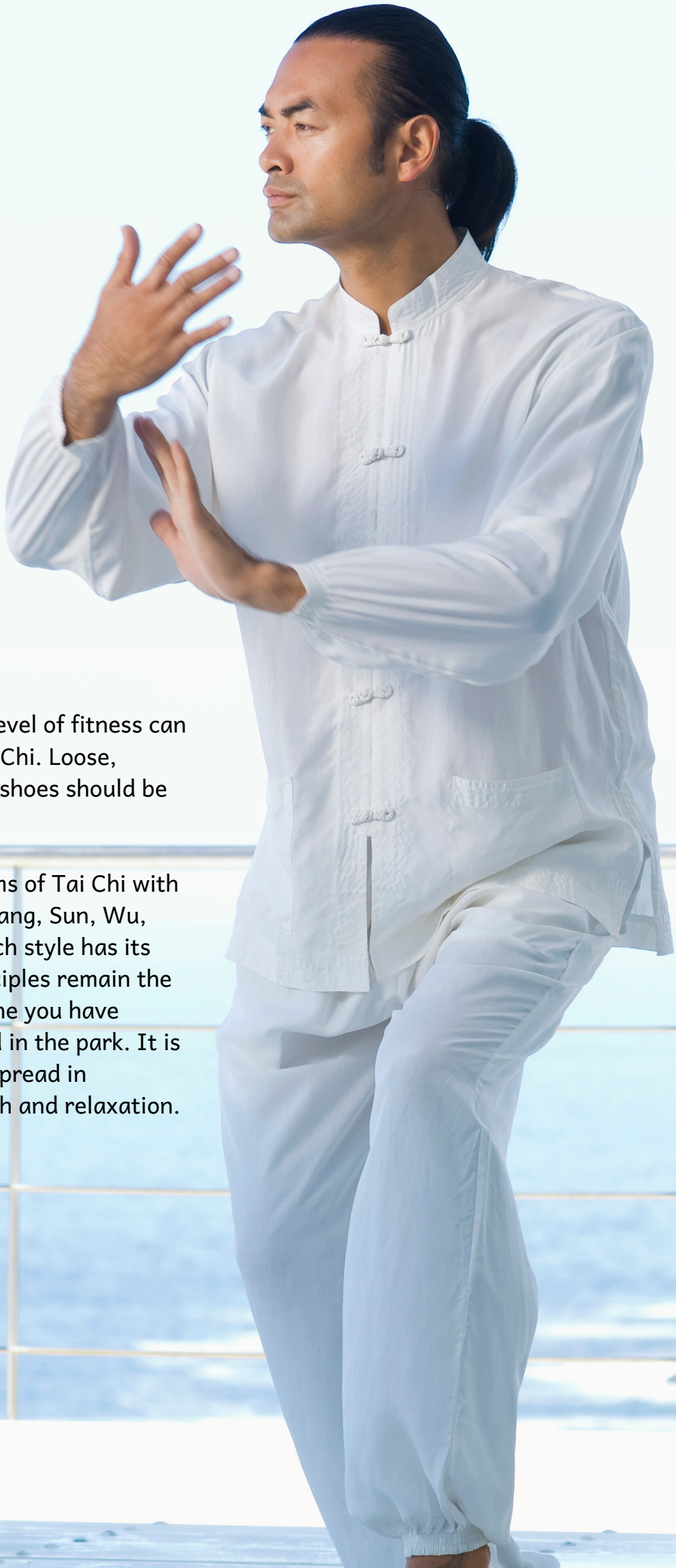


Tai Chi

Tai Chi, or Taijiquan in Chinese, is embedded in traditional Chinese culture and is valuable in promoting health, developing combat and self-defence skills, and improving concentration and overall well-being.

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A man with dark hair tied in a ponytail, wearing a white long-sleeved Tai Chi jacket and white trousers, is performing a Tai Chi pose on a balcony. He is looking to his left with a focused expression. His hands are raised in front of him, palms facing each other. The background shows a blue sky and a body of water through a glass railing.

Anyone regardless of age or level of fitness can practice and benefit from Tai Chi. Loose, comfortable clothing and flat shoes should be worn to classes.

There are many different forms of Tai Chi with the main styles being Chen, Yang, Sun, Wu, Woo and Dong Yue. While each style has its own characteristics, the principles remain the same. The Yang style is the one you have probably seen being practiced in the park. It is the style responsible for the spread in popularity of Tai Chi for health and relaxation.

*Whoever practices Tai Chi regularly
will in time gain
the suppleness of a child,
the strength of a lion,
and the peace of mind of a sage.'*

Chinese Proverb

Although originally developed (and still practiced) as a martial arts system, Tai Chi has been used to keep fit and prevent and cure diseases amongst the Chinese people since the 16th century.

Today, it's principally a tranquil, gentle and pleasurable means of attaining and maintaining health and harmony in mind and body, mobility, suppleness and mental alertness.

The benefits of Tai Chi are recognized by practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine, who are often Tai Chi instructors.

From a psychological point of view, Tai Chi helps release emotional tensions, increases concentration and awareness and decreases stressful psychological and physiological reactions.

When undertaking Tai Chi movements, muscles and joints should be relaxed to such a degree that all rigidity disappears.

Your mind should be tranquil but at the same time it also must be alert with consciousness commanding the body.

A high degree of concentration is important to ensure the movements are performed correctly.

All routines should be performed slowly and smoothly as the movements are in accord with the natural motions of the human body.

Body movements are also well coordinated. The legs act as a base, the waist as an axis and the hands, eyes, bodies and limbs as a whole throughout the exercise. Though the movements are slow, each part of the body is in constant motion.

Imagery plays an important part in Tai Chi. Names are given to movements which evoke mental images to assist in the learning process.



Eight Important Points of Tai Chi Practice

1. Softness

All movements should be relaxed. Exert no unnecessary strength.

2. Ideation

The mind leads and controls the body. Visualise the movement. Qi follows Yi (mind).

3. Slowness

Allows precise control and awareness.

4. Evenness

There should be no stops or gaps. Flow like a great river. Maintain control and coordination of movement.

5. Roundness

Seen in all movements. Limbs should be naturally extended yet relaxed and well rounded.

6. Differentiate Yin and Yang

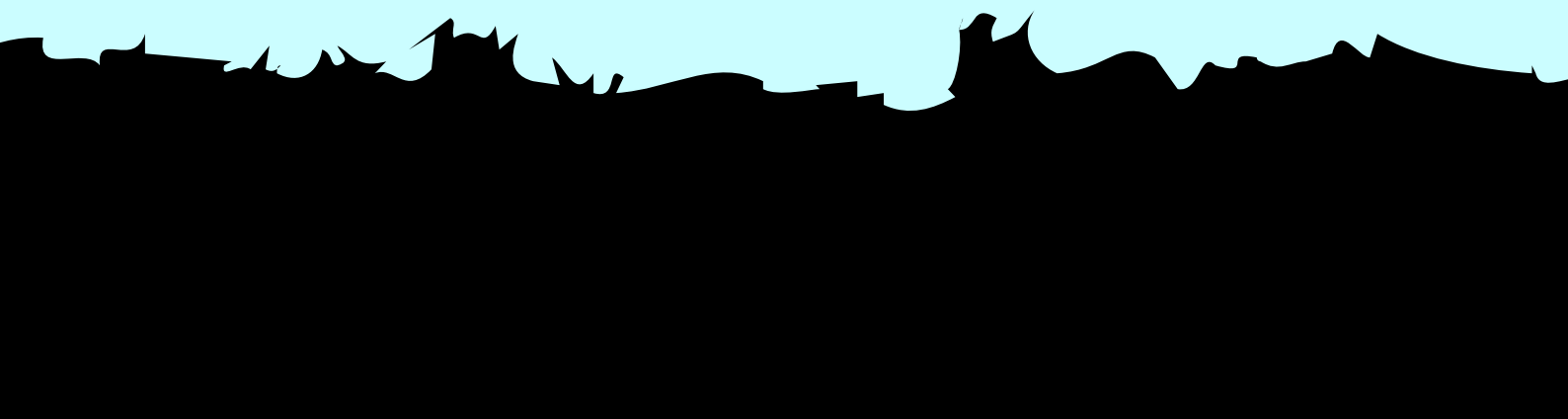
(Substantial and Insubstantial). There is continual change from substantial to insubstantial. Avoid double weightedness.

7. Breathing

Should be fine, long, calm and slow. Relaxed and ultimately combined with the movements.

8. All Parts Move As One

When one part of the body moves all parts move.



Tai Chi provides many benefits when practiced regularly over a lifetime:

- Produces a refreshed, greater mental focus
- Creates better sleep patterns
- Boosts the body immune system
- Protects joints and bones
- Promotes muscle fitness
- Stimulates body endorphins production
- Greater creative capacity and mental energy
- Improved muscle efficiency, body tone and body posture
- Maintained reflexes and neuronal efficiency
- Greater self esteem, and generosity as a personality trait
- Greater production of anti stress hormones (ACTH)
- Increased endorphin production (the make you feel good chemical)
- Increased sense of calmness
- Sense of belongingness (practicing in groups)
- Improved bodily functions
- Improved mental alertness and concentration

