

Steps One and Two of this chapter are warm up and stretching exercises combined with tai chi movements. Practicing them regularly will enhance your flexibility and tune up your muscles.

Before You Start

Wear loose, comfortable clothing and flat, well-fitting shoes.

Don't continue doing any movement that is painful or causes you discomfort.

Do all movements slowly, continuously and smoothly.

Move well within your comfort range. The first time you do a movement, stretch to only 70 percent of your normal range and increase that range gradually.

When appropriate do both sides.

Step One - Warm Up Exercises

For one or two minutes, walk around, gently shaking your hands and legs, and clenching and unclenching your hands. This loosens your body and joints in preparation for the exercises that follow.

Step Two - Stretching Exercises

Do each stretch 3-5 times. It doesn't matter which side you do first.

If you have any difficulty balancing, use a chair or the wall for support. Remember, in each session, to stretch to only 70 percent of your normal range and gradually increase that range.

We're going to gently stretch six parts of the body- neck, shoulders, spine, hips, knees and ankles - with two exercises for each body part. It might help you to remember them by knowing we are working from the top down, starting with the neck, and ending at the ankles.

Unless otherwise specified, keep your feet shoulder width apart.

Neck



Head Back

As you inhale, bring both hands up slowly, imagining your wrists are being lifted by two balloons..

Turn your palms so that your fingers are pointing upward. Bring them toward your chest, push your chin backward gently.



Head Down

Exhaling, push both hands outward, extending them in front of you, and then press your hands down slowly and gently. At the same time, slowly bring your head down toward your chest.



Turning Head

Bring your left hand up and look at your palm. Your right hand should be down near your hip, palm facing the ground.



Move your left hand to the left, turning only your head to the left and keeping your eyes on your palm. Now come back to face front. Change palms so that your right palm is now facing you and the left is down near the left hip. Turn to the right while looking at the right palm.

Shoulders



Shoulder Roll

Roll shoulders gently forward and then backward.

Gathering Qi

Inhaling, extend both arms to the side, elbows slightly lower than your hands. With palms facing up, move your arms up in a curve to above your head.



As you exhale, gently press your hands down in front of your body to just below your navel.



Spine

Stretch Spine

Hands in front, as though you're carrying a large beach ball. Inhale.



Exhaling, push one hand up as though your palm is pushing against the ceiling, fingertips facing inward. At the same time, push the other hand down by your side. Then change hands.



Spine Turn

Hands in front, as though you're carrying a large beach ball. Left hand on top.



With knees slightly bent, turn your waist gently to the left. Then change hands, putting the right hand on top and turn to the right. Keep your back upright and supple.

Hip



Forward Stretch

Placing your left heel out in front of you, push both hands back to help balance.

Step backward with your left foot resting on the toes, and stretching your hands forward to about shoulder height. Repeat on the other side.

An easier alternative is to step your toes near the right foot before stepping backward.



Side Stretch

Push your hands to the side as though you're pushing against a wall. At the same time, stretch the opposite foot sideways.



Knees

Kick

Make loose fists, palm side up, resting at the sides of the hips.

Stretch out one foot (like a kicking motion but slowly and gently). At the same time, punch out gently with the opposite fist, turning it palm down. Bring your arm and leg back in and repeat on the other side.



Step Forward

With fists next to hips as above, bend your knees slightly and step forward with one foot.

18. Bring your foot back and do the other side.

Ankles



Tapping ankle

Tap foot with heel.

Tap foot with toes



Rotation

Toe down, lift up the heel and gently rotate your foot in one direction three times, and then in the other direction three times. Change feet.

Alternative: Resting your foot on your heel, turn your foot inward and outward several times. Change feet.



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