

8-Form Easy Tai Chi: An Instructor's Training Manual

Oregon Research Institute

Healthy Aging Research Group

January 2002

Table of Contents

A. About this Manual	3
B. Highlighted Training Principles	4
C. 8-Form Easy Tai Chi Movements	5-7
D. A Typical Training Session	8-10
E. Practice Distribution of 8-Form Easy Tai Chi	11-11
F. Safety Issues	11-11
G. References	11-11

A. About this Manual

In this instructor's training manual, we present the 8-Form Easy Tai Chi (Li, Fisher, Harmer, and Shirai, in press). This manual is designed to be used in research interventions of promoting health-related quality of life. Each instructor should have a copy of this manual.

The basic routine presented in the 8-form Easy Tai Chi consists of 6 movements plus the commencing and closing forms, all of which are derived from the contemporary 24-Form Simplified Tai Chi (China National Sports Commission, 1983). Easy Tai Chi, which takes about 3 minutes to complete, is specifically designed for elderly persons or for individuals with mobility challenges and/or physical impairments.

Easy Tai Chi follows a gradual, simple-to-difficult progression with the movement execution beginning with upper-body motion (involving arm, shoulder, and trunk movements) and minimal demands for postural control. It then moves to forms with increasing postural demands involving whole body-limb coordination. Teaching of Easy Tai Chi should emphasize body and trunk rotation, flexion of hips and knees, weight shifting, reciprocal arm movements, and balance. A detailed introduction to the 8-Form Easy Tai Chi can be found in Li et al. (in press). Preliminary results suggest that the 8-Form Easy Tai Chi may be potentially as effective in enhancing functional ability and health status in elderly individuals as the more complex 24-Form version.

This manual is designed for instructors to help familiarize them with the basic movement and teaching principles in 8-Form Easy Tai Chi. It is expected that instructors teaching the Easy Tai Chi should have basic knowledge and teaching experience with the traditional short 24-form Yang style. The manual starts by highlighting the main training principles that are often recommended by Tai Chi masters in their practice. Next, directions of performing the eight forms are given a step-by-step manner. The full cycle should take about 3 minutes to complete.

A video clip of the full set of Easy Tai Chi forms can be viewed through authors' website at <http://www.ori.org/wellness/taichi/taichi.html>.

B. Highlighted Training Principles

Essentials

The core part of Tai Chi training or practice follow a set of essential principles. Specifically, the following ten essentials should be followed:

1. Straightening the head
2. Containing the chest and raising the back
3. Relaxing waist
4. Distinguishing insubstantial and substantial
5. Sinking the shoulders and elbows
6. Using consciousness, not strength
7. Upper and lower following one another
8. Internal and external are united
9. Continuity
10. Tranquillity in movement

Helpful Guidelines

Based on these ten essentials, the following training guidelines may be followed:

1. Complete body and mind relaxation: Tai Chi practice requires the practitioner to eliminate all other thoughts and to focus on movement, breathing, relaxation, and distribution of weight.
2. Balancing weight: Tai Chi emphasizes alternating balance between a weight-bearing leg (“Solid”) and a non-weight-bearing (“Hollow”) leg. In Tai Chi, this is referred to as the “substantial” and “insubstantial” of weight-balancing.
3. Breathing: Breathing must be smooth, regular and coordinated with the movements.
4. Movement continuity/flow: All movements are done slowly with no pauses or breaks, that is, the postures should flow evenly from start to finish. In essence, all movements are slow, continuous, even, circular, and smooth.

C. 8-Form Easy Tai Chi Movements

The names of the 8-Form Easy Tai Chi are as follow

Form 1: Commencing form

Form 2: Repulse Monkey (Right and Left)

Form 3: Grasp Peacock's Tail (Ward off, Rollback, Press, Push) (Left and Right)

Form 4: Move hands like Clouds (Left)

Form 5: Fair Lady Works at Shuttles (Left and Right)

Form 6: Golden Cock Stands on one Leg (Left and Right)

Form 7: Brush Knees and Twist Steps (Left and Right)

Form 8: Closing Form

The following provides a detailed movement description of 8-Form Easy Tai Chi. Instructors who wish to see actual motion pictures can visit authors' website at <http://www.ori.org/wellness/taichi/taichi.html>. In describing the movements, we indicate steps necessary to complete each form. Where needed, transitional movements between one form to another are indicated.

Form 1: Commencing Form

Pre-commencing stance: Feet together with both knee unlocked, arms at sides, facing forward.

Step 1: with a slight weight-shift to the right, left foot takes a half step to left so that the feet are a shoulder's width apart. Toes point forward and arms hang naturally alongside the body.

Step 2: Slowly raise both arms up, elbows unlocked, to shoulder level, keeping the palms facing down.

Transitional Movement: Slightly lowering both arms while bending legs

Form 2: Repulse Monkey

Step 1: From the transitional movement described above, move the right hand downward in a semicircle to shoulder level with the palm facing up while extending the left arm with the palm facing up. Shift body weight gradually to the left as the arm movements are being executed.

Step 2: Push right hand forward with the body weight simultaneously shifted to the right side while the left arm lowering in a downward arch passing the left hip ending at the shoulder level.

Repeat the movements twice on each side.

Transitional Movement: The Repulse Monkey Form finishes up in a ball-holding position of hands on the right side.

Form 3: Grasp Peacock's Tail

This form consists of four parts: (a) Ward off, (b) Pull back, (c) Press, and (d) Push.

Step 1 (Ward off): From the transitional movement, the left foot steps away from the mid-line of the body (towards left side), then turn the upper body to 45 degrees facing the left. Move left hand forward arriving at eye level while pressing the right hand down obliquely to the side of the right hip with the palm facing downward. This completes Ward off.

Step 2: Turn torso slight to left while moving the right hand forward. Then, pull both hands down in a curve past abdomen, until right hand is extended sideways at shoulder level with the elbow bend upward, and right hand then join the left hand in front of chest. This completes Pull back.

Step 3: With the weight seated in the (rear) right foot, push forward both hands with shoulders relaxed and elbows dropped. Both hands are extended and palms toward the front. This completes Press.

Step 4: At the end of Push, pull both arms back towards the chest then push them out. This completes Push.

Repeat all four mini forms on the right side.

Form 4: Move Hands like Clouds (Left side only)

Step 1. From the end of Form 3, move both arms (45 degrees) to the left side and simultaneously shift the weight into the left leg. Then, move right hand in a arc past face with palm facing inward, while left hand moves downward.

Step 2. Turn torso gradually to the left with the weight shifting onto left leg. Simultaneously, move left hand upward with the palm facing inward and passing through the left shoulder while the right hand swing downward following the direction of the left hand. The right leg joins the left leg.

Repeat the movement three times.

Transitional Movement: The Move Hand like Clouds Form finishes with a ball-holding position of hands on the right side.

Form 5: Fair Lady Works at Shuttles

Step 1: From the end of Form 4, step out (45 degrees to the left) with left foot. Left hand blocks upward while right hand pushes straightforward.

Step 2: Drop right hand. Step out (45 degrees to the right). Right hand blocks upward while left hand pushes straightforward.

Form 6: Golden Cock Stands on One Leg (Left and Right)

Step 1: from the end of left side shuttle of Form 5, move the arm upward while lifting right leg.

Step 2: Finish standing on the left foot with the arm down on the side. Repeat Steps 1 and 2 on the right foot.

Form 7: Brush Knees and Twist Steps

Step 1. At the end of one leg standing (right leg) movement, turn torso slowly to the right as right hand circles up to ear level with arm slightly bent and palm facing obliquely upward, while left hand follows the direction of the right hand.

Step 2. Turn torso to the left as left foot takes a step in a forward direction. At the same time, left hand push forward passing knee, while right hand push forward. Repeat this on the right side knee.

Form 8: Closing Form

Step 1: From the end of Form 7, bring left foot forward so that it places next to the right foot with knee slightly bent (unlocked). In the same time, move both hands upward (at face level) ending hands crossed in front of chest with palms facing inward.

Step 2: Straighten both legs. Turn palms forward and downward while lowering both hands gradually alongside the body. Look straight ahead.

D. A Typical Training Session

A general plan for an in-class practice session of Easy Tai Chi may involve the following components: (1) a 10-minute warm-up, (2) 40 minutes of practicing Easy Tai Chi movements/postures, and (3) a 5-minute cool-down. A five-minute break between practice sessions is recommended to allow learners to rest and interact socially.

Warm-up

A preliminary period of stretching and light activity involving the large muscle groups for 10 min is appropriate for the program. Warm-up is important to help prevent muscle strain or tears from sudden over-lengthening of the musculotendinous unit. Warm-up also helps increase the speed of nerve impulses, which provides greater body movement potential.

Warm-up activities in the standing position should emphasize circular movements of the ankles, knees, and hips. Examples of warm-up activity may include: Easy walking around room with various motions and activities to increase tempo of warm-up such as:

1. Walking at a moderate pace in order to increase heart rate and core body temperature
2. Upper body gross movements while walking (e.g. arm circles, biceps curls, etc.)
3. Stretching exercises for all major muscle groups

Core Tai Chi practice

Movements

Following the warm-up, it is recommended that single static movements be practiced. This can be done by holding each single movement statically (in a stationary position) for a period of 5–10 seconds. The static movement practice is easy to perform because it has the lowest attentional demand for postural control and fewest between-limbs movement coordination tasks for beginners. It also enables the learners/performers to get the idea of setting a correct posture and a sense of body alignment and weight centering.

The proposed single movements practice may be followed by performing each single moving movement. This increases selective attention and allows learners/performers to experience appropriate alignment for balance, and to coordinate rotations of limb and trunk. Each movement should be practiced repetitively (8–10 repetitions) under a slow, self-controlled speed. After some successful initial practice of these static and moving movements, learners/performers should be ready to move on to linking each of the 8 postures of Easy Tai Chi in a sequential, continuous manner. Each daily session should consist of a minimum of five sets of Easy Tai Chi, along with repeated practice of each movement.

Breathing

As in all forms of Tai Chi, breathing is an important part of Easy Tai Chi and is linked closely with all movements (e.g., breathing in when raising arms and breathing out when pressing arms down). Breathing should be natural, rhythmic, and full, but not forced. Breaths should originate from the diaphragm (i.e., deep abdominal breathing, not the

usual chest breathing) and the inhale-exhale rhythm should be comfortably coordinated with the flow of all movements.

Cool-down

May repeat warm-up activities.

E. Practice Distribution of 8-Forms Easy Tai Chi

Assuming that the class is conducted three times (or sessions) per week for six months, the following practice distribution of the 8-Form Easy Tai Chi is generally recommended.

Month 1:

- a. General orientation of Tai Chi and 8-form Easy Tai Chi (first session)
- b. Learning and practicing Forms 1 through 3
- c. Repeated practice of Forms 1 through 3

Month 2:

- a. Reinforcing and practicing Forms 1 through 3
- b. Learning and practicing Form 4
- c. Integrating Forms 1 through 4

Month 3:

- a. Reinforcing and practicing Forms 1 through 4
- b. Learning and practicing Forms 5 and 6
- c. Integrating Forms 1 through 6

Month 4:

- a. Reinforcing and practicing Forms 1 through 6
- b. Learning and practicing Form 7
- c. Integrating Forms 1 through 7

Month 5:

- a. Reinforcing and practicing Forms 1 through 7
- b. Learning and practicing Form 8
- c. Integrating Forms 1 through 8

Month 6:

- a. Integrating all forms and practicing the whole 8-form routine.

Note. Additional practice at home or office is strongly recommended.

E. Safety Issues

Controlling body posture and preventing injury are primary concerns for senior Tai Chi participants. These concerns warrant attention over the entire sequence of events that constitute a practice session, ranging from the warm-up exercise, the review of previously learned movements, the teaching or practicing of new skills, and the ending of practice.

In principle, movements of the whole body as well as the upper and lower extremities should be coordinated to reduce the likelihood of injuries. For example, the components of the leg should be turned simultaneously rather than segments. In addition, warm-up exercises should be directed toward the major joints of the body such as the shoulders, elbows, wrists, wrists, knees, and ankles. A five-minute warm-up routine is strongly recommended for effectively preparing seniors for Tai Chi practice.

F. References

- China National Sports Commission. (1983). *Simplified Taijiquan*. Beijing, China: People's Sports.
- Li, F., Fisher, J. K., Harmer, P., & Shirai, M. (in press). A Simpler 8-Form Easy Tai Chi for Elderly Persons. *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*.