

Taiji Yang Shen Gong (last updated on Jun 1st, 2016)

Also known as joint loosening exercises, these are a variety of movements to loosen up the joints and stretch the muscles groups prior to our classes. This set of exercises can be used as warm ups to many sports or other activities. Main idea is to loosen the nine sets of joints and stretch the large muscles groups.

The following list of movements is adapted from Grandmaster Chen Zhen Lei's book on Taiji for Health and augmented with movements from other teachers and personal trainers.

List of movements

1. Circling Head and stretching the neck muscles
2. Wrist Rotations
3. Elbow rotations
4. Shoulder rotations
5. Arm swings backwards and forwards
6. Open the chest with pulls to the sides and back
7. Stretch the arms
8. Upper torso twisting
9. Lower torso twisting
10. Floppy arms swings
11. Kidney massage
12. Hip rotations
13. Knee rotations
14. Ankle rotations / ligaments stretching
15. Single leg lifts
16. Bend forward and reverse with squats
17. Lunges – forwards, back foot flat, back foot heel up, sides
18. (Optional) Variations of stretches including pistol squats and calves stretches
19. Weight shifting
20. Spine stretching
21. Close by doing some kicks or taking 3 breaths in before the kicks to loosen up the body.

Details of movements

1. Circling Head and stretching the neck muscles
 - a. Easiest way is to let the head hang downwards and as you rotate the head, feel the neck muscles getting stretched to one side or the other.
 - b. Another variation of this is just to look down and look up, then Look left and look right.
2. Wrist Rotations
 - a. Variation 1
 - i. Clasp the hands together by lacing the fingers.
 - ii. Rotate left so the right hand is up.
 - iii. Push with the right hand down and towards the left to rotate the left hand up.
 - iv. Push with the left hand down and towards the right to rotate the right hand up.
 - v. Repeat by keeping the pushes light and loose.
 - b. Variation 2

- ii. Make fists with hands and flex arms up in front at elbows.
 - iii. Lower arms and flex again and lower arms.
 - iv. Open hands and with arms straighten, raise both arms up straight and push back. Palms will be facing one another.
 - v. Lower arms and repeat (iv) and lower arms again.
 - vi. Repeat (ii) – (v)
- c. Variation 3
- i. Start with arms by the sides and make fists with hands.
 - ii. Flex arms up in front at elbows.
 - iii. Lower arms and flex again and lower arms.
 - iv. Raise arms to the front with elbows straight.
 - v. Pull elbows back like punching with the elbows to the back.
 - vi. Punch forward and lower arms.
 - vii. Repeat (iv) – (vi) again.
 - viii. Repeat (ii) – (vii)
8. Upper torso twisting
- a. The torso is divided into two parts. The upper torso ends around the base of the chest. The lower torso is between that and the hip.
 - b. Important thing here is to keep the knees fixed and hip facing forward. We are trying to isolate the upper torso muscle group.
 - c. Start by making fists with both hands.
 - d. Hold the fists in front of the chest and with the palms facing downwards. Elbows bent.
 - e. Twist with the upper torso to one side, relax and twist again.
 - f. Then twist to the other side.
 - g. If you find yourself moving the shoulders to reach left or right, then bring the arms in, press them against the chest and keep the fists under the chin to do the twisting.
9. Lower torso twisting
- a. Same hand positions and requirements as upper torso twisting.
 - b. Try to twist at the waist, watch that hip.
 - c. Learn to separate the lower and upper torso.
10. Floppy arms swings
- a. The swings are done by timing the twisting of the lower torso and upper torso.
 - b. Start with feet apart and arms relaxed to the sides.
 - c. Using the core muscles, twist the lower torso to one side, when you feel the lower torso has reached the end of a twist, let the upper torso twist further.
 - d. Relax upper torso then lower torso then twist to the other side.
 - e. Let the arms flop naturally.
 - f. To make the arms swing higher, look left and right as you are twisting.
 - g. Then try to look behind. When twisting the right, look for the left heel. When twisting to the left, look for the right heel.
 - h. It is alright if the hip moves left and right here but keep the knees pushing outwards and not twisting inwards.
- Note: Chen Zhi Qiang, uses this movement to also hit a few key spots on the body. His arms never go higher than the lower rib cage. Others have hands hitting the back part of the shoulders. Keep here is to relax and feel that timing from lower to upper torso.*
11. Kidney massage
- a. After the swings, the hands will feel warm.
 - b. Rub the hands together to build up the warmth.
 - c. Place the arm palms on top of the kidneys and rub the area.

12. Hip rotation

- a. Hands on the waist or above the hip or behind the back (usually as fists, with back of fists pressing on the kidneys)
- b. Make hip rotations like there is a hula-hoop around your hip.
- c. Another variation is to push out on one side, move it to the other side, and pull back and then move.
- d. Important thing here is to loosen the kwa or the space where the femur connects into the pelvis, aka the ball and socket joint.

13. Knee rotations

a. Variation 1

- i. Start with feet apart, place hands gently on top of knee caps
- ii. With feet flat on the ground (watch those toes), guide the knees outwards towards the front and then bring them back from the back. No need to make big circles with the knees, keep the rotations on top of the feet.
- iii. Repeat by rotating the knees inwards at the front.
- iv. Then place feet together, and again watch the toes, keep feet flat.
- v. Keep knees pressed together gently and rotate the knees to the same side and then change to the other side.

b. Variation 2

- i. Drawing circles with toes for knee rotation is commonly done by Chen Xiao Wang.
- ii. Stand on one leg, with knee slightly bent. Lift the other leg with toes touching the ground.
- iii. Draw circles with the toes, first outwards and then inwards.
- iv. Very slight hip rotation. This is analogous to the elbow rotations.
- v. Switch leg.
- vi. This is also a good exercise for stability and a good way to gauge your progress. The core will need to be engaged for stability.

14. Ankle rotations / ligaments stretching

- a. Standing on one leg, place the other leg to the side with toes touching the ground.
- b. Keeping toes on the ground, push the heel outwards to feel the outside ligament stretching.
- c. Pull in the heel from the back and push it out again towards the front.
- d. Repeat by pulling the heel towards the front and pushing backwards to stretch the ligament.
- e. Place the foot on the side in front of you and put as much weight as you can tolerate to stretch the outer ligament.

15. Single leg lifts

- a. Purpose here is to stretch one ham string at a time.
- b. Stand on one leg, knees slightly bent (for stability).
- c. Place the other leg out towards the back with toes touching.
- d. Tighten the glutes to lift the back leg.
- e. Keep both sides of the hip facing the ground, not one side up.
- f. Lift leg first before letting the body tilt forward.
- g. Lift until you can feel the ham string of the standing leg stretching.
- h. Do a few of those and increase the lift like you are lifting the quads higher.
- i. Repeat on the other side.

16. Bend forward and reverse with squats

- a. Stretch both ham strings together by reaching forward.

- b. Keep knees locked straight.
- c. Start bending at the waist, one spine at a time, bend forward and breathe out at the same time.
- d. Hands can be on top of the knees or just let it hang down.
- e. Keep bending until you can feel both ham strings stretching.
- f. Hold it there for a 10-20 seconds. OK to bounce at this position.
- g. Slowly come up to starting position.
- h. Reserve the stretch by squatting down with body upright.
- i. Lower yourself by sitting backwards, knees together, body upright until you feel the quads stretching.
- j. Hold it for 20-30 seconds and then stand up.
- k. Repeat (b) – (j) again.

17. Lunges

- a. Take a big step forward, keep the back foot flat on ground.
- b. Push into the front leg and feel the outside of the thigh and calf stretching. If you don't feel it, push the back leg back or step forward more.
- c. Keep the front knee behind the toes of the front leg.
- d. Change sides and repeat for the other side.
- e. Change die again and this time, raise the heel of the back foot.
- f. You want to feel the stretch in front of the thigh. If you don't feel it, push back the back leg more.
- g. If you want to challenge yourself and so some strength training, keep front and back legs bent at 90 degrees at the knees and with the back knee off the ground, hold it for 30 seconds.
- h. Change side and repeat for other leg.
- i. Open feet apart more and shift weight to one of the legs. Turn the toes or the other leg to point to the side and the lift the toes to point up to straighten that leg. You should also feel the calf stretching.
- j. With toes pointing up, bend body sideward to get shoulder to meet the knee. Keep the other shoulder pushed backwards. You will feel the stretch on the inside of the thigh.
- k. Hold it for 10 – 20 seconds and change side to repeat the stretch on the other leg.

18. (Optional) Variations of stretches including pistol squats and calves stretches

19. Weight shifting

- a. With feet wide apart, shift weight to one side.
- b. Shift weight back and forth by relaxing into the kwa on the weighted leg and pushing the knees backwards to change weight to the other side.
- c. No lateral knee movements.

20. Spine stretching

- a. Feet together, hands by the sides.
- b. Lace the fingers together and push outwards with the palms in front of you.
- c. Raise outstretches arms up and breathe in as you are raising the arms. When you reach the top, continue breathing in and go up on your toes (heels up). Then relax everything and drop into a squat if you can.
- d. Let everything go while breathing out.
- e. Repeat a couple more times.

21. Close by doing some kicks or taking 3 breaths in before the kicks to loosen up the body.

Wang Hai Jun is known for his intense Warm up exercises. Click on this page to see that.

<http://www.corniceengineering.com/wanghaijun/Articles/articlesbltao8.htm>

Chen Hui Xian's' warm up videos

Part 1 - <https://youtu.be/Rg6GmkNaM2Y>

Part 2 - <https://youtu.be/DNHTjWhfrdw>

Part 3 - https://youtu.be/9A1_l6LNGZ0

Part 4 - <https://youtu.be/CyKCpiwQmmU>

Part 6 - <https://youtu.be/8rcd2Zq06-k>

Chen Zheng Lei's warm up video

<https://youtu.be/gdo4HfO2aX0>