

# Taiji Yang Shen Gong (last updated on Apr 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020)

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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

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## Details of movements

1. Head rotations
  - 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
  - Variation 1
    - a. Clasp the hands together by lacing the fingers. Rotate left so the right hand is up. Push with the right hand down and towards the left to rotate the left hand up. Push with the left hand down and towards the right to rotate the right hand up. Repeat by keeping the pushes light and loose.
  - Variation 2
    - b. Hold out your hands and make circles outwards with the hands and then make circles inwards with the hands, making sure the wrists are rotating

### 3. Elbow rotations

- a. Raise arms up at elbows with palms facing up. Push hands down and outwards to the side, by rotating the lower arm, not the wrist. Palms will be facing down and out on the sides. Bring the arms back to starting position by rotating the forearms so that the palms face up again.

### 4. Shoulder rotations

- a. Flex arms up so the fingers are lightly touching the front of the shoulders. Raise the elbows up, push them to the sides and then down and then back up in front again. Keep shoulder blades pointed downwards and if you hear the shoulder joints popping, you have gone too far.

### 5. Arm swings

For this movement, do not use arms strength to swing, let the weight of the arm do the work.

- a. Place left hand on the front of right shoulder.
- b. Raise right arm up on the right side.
- c. Lower the right arm to the back with palm facing down.
- d. At shoulder height, let gravity do the work and drop the arm, i.e. release the muscles holding the arm up.
- e. Let the arm swing towards the front and when it gets to shoulder height, you may have to give it a nudge to bring the arms back to the top. Repeat.
- f. Reverse the swings, start at the top, lower the arm forward and at shoulder height, drop the arm let it swing to the back.
- g. Again, keep shoulder blades pointing downwards and if you hear popping, you have gone too far.
- h. Also, it is fine to turn the body slightly to the side when the arms are reaching the back.

### 6. Opening the chest

This is to stretch the muscles across the chest.

- a. Start by making fists with both hands.
- b. Hold the fists in front of the chest and with the palms facing downwards. Elbows bent.
- c. Pull fists apart to stretch the chest. Keep elbows bent.
- d. Release the stretch and let fists return to the front of the chest.
- e. Repeat (d) – (e).
- f. Change fists to open hand with palms facing upwards.
- g. Reach outwards to the front to straighten the arms and then separate the arms to the sides.
- h. Pull arms back to the front with arms stretched out and push to the sides again.
- i. Change open hands to fists and repeat (b) – (i).

### 7. Stretch the arms

#### Variation 1

- a. Raise one arm up and keep the other arm down by the sides.
- b. Push both arms towards the back, relax and push again.
- c. Change arms positions. If left arm was down, left arm is up now.
- d. Repeat (b)

#### Variation 2

- a. Start with arms by the sides.
- b. Make fists with hands and flex arms up in front at elbows.
- c. Lower arms and flex again and lower arms.

- d. Open hands and with arms straighten, raise both arms up straight and push back. Palms will be facing one another.
- e. Lower arms and repeat (d) and lower arms again.
- f. Repeat (b) – (e)

Variation 3

- a. Start with arms by the sides and make fists with hands.
- b. Flex arms up in front at elbows.
- c. Lower arms and flex again and lower arms.
- d. Raise arms to the front with elbows straight.
- e. Pull elbows back like punching with the elbows to the back.
- f. Punch forward and lower arms.
- g. Repeat (b) – (f) again.

8. Upper torso twisting

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. Important thing here is to keep the knees fixed and hip facing forward. We are trying to isolate the upper torso muscle group.

- a. Start by making fists with both hands.
- b. Hold the fists in front of the chest and with the palms facing downwards. Elbows bent.
- c. Twist with the upper torso to one side, relax and twist again.
- d. Then twist to the other side.
- e. 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

Same hand positions and requirements as upper torso twisting. Try to twist at the waist, watch that hip. Learn to separate the lower and upper torso.

10. Floppy arms swings

The swings are done by timing the twisting of the lower torso and upper torso.

- a. Start with feet apart and arms relaxed to the sides.
- b. 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.
- c. Relax upper torso then lower torso then twist to the other side.
- d. Let the arms flop naturally.
- e. To make the arms swing higher, look left and right as you are twisting.
- f. Then try to look behind. When twisting the right, look for the left heel. When twisting to the left, look for the right heel.
- g. 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

After the swings, the hands will feel warm.

- a. Rub the hands together to build up the warmth.
- b. 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

##### Variation 1

- a. Start with feet apart, place hands gently on top of kneecaps.
- b. 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.
- c. Repeat by rotating the knees inwards at the front.
- d. The place feet together, and again watch the toes, keep feet flat.
- e. Keep knees pressed together gently and rotate the knees to the same side and then change to the other side.

##### Variation 2

Drawing circles with toes for knee rotation is commonly done by Chen Xiao Wang.

- a. Stand on one leg, with knee slightly bent. Lift the other leg with toes touching the ground.
- b. Draw circles with the toes, first outwards and then inwards.
- c. Very slight hip rotation. This is analogous to the elbow rotations.
- d. Switch leg.
- e. 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. Stretch the calves

- a. Take a big step forward and shift weight back to the back leg.
- b. Keeping the front leg straight, point the toes upwards, towards the ceiling or the sky.
- c. Sit down on the back leg and stretch the front leg. You can feel the stretch through the calf. Hold it there for 10 - 20 seconds.
- d. Switch side and repeat on other leg.

- e. Switch back again, and repeat but this time, sit down more on the back leg so you can reach the front toes with your hands to grab them and pull them back towards your face.
- f. Switch legs and repeat.
- g. Big challenge. Switch again and after pulling the toes inwards towards you, hold on to the leg and lift the foot up and hold for 5s. Switch and repeat.

#### 16. Single leg lifts

Purpose here is to stretch one ham string at a time.

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

#### 17. Bend forward and reverse with squats

Stretch both ham strings together by reaching forward.

- a. Keep knees locked straight.
- b. Start bending at the waist, one vertebra at a time, bend forward and breathe out at the same time.
- c. Hands can be on top of the knees or just let it hang down.
- d. Keep bending until you can feel both ham strings stretching.
- e. Hold it there for a 10-20 seconds. OK to bounce at this position.
- f. Slowly come up to starting position.
- g. Reverse the stretch by squatting down with body upright.
- h. Lower yourself by sitting backwards, knees together, body upright until you feel the quads stretching.
- i. Hold it for 20-30 seconds and then stand up.
- j. Repeat at least 3 times. Each time you do this, you can feel you can reach further when bending forward.

#### 18. 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. If you want to challenge yourself and do 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.
- f. Change sides again and this time, raise the heel of the back foot.
- g. You want to feel the stretch in front of the thigh. If you don't feel it, push back the back leg more.
- h. If you want a challenge here, bring the arm on the same side of the back leg upwards to point towards the ceiling or sky. Bring the other arm behind your back and point the

fingers towards the floor or ground. Tilt the body to the side perpendicularly to the direction of the legs.

- i. Change side and repeat for other leg.
  - j. 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 then lift the toes to point up to straighten that leg. You should also feel the calf stretching.
  - k. With toes pointing up, bend body sideways to get shoulder to meet the knee. Keep the other shoulder pushed backwards. You will feel the stretch on the inside of the thigh.
  - l. Hold it for 10 – 20 seconds and change side to repeat the stretch on the other leg.
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 outstretched 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. Pay attention to the head, look straight in front as you are coming back down, not at the floor.
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](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>