

How to Develop the Practice Habit

When you first begin your study of tai chi and qigong you should relax and be flexible with the issue of practicing. Practice whatever you like – especially those things that you have enjoyed in class. Practice whenever you feel like it. Don't try to uproot your existing schedule to accommodate your practice, just fit in some time for tai chi when you can. If that means 5 minutes of sitting meditation while you're waiting for supper to cook, or a few moving qigong exercises when you've been in front of the computer screen for too long, or some extra focus applied to your posture while standing in line at Target, just let your interest lead you. Do not make your practice another "chore" that you must accomplish each day. Give free reign to your curiosity and your enthusiasm – nurture your initial motivation for starting this class. Do not worry about doing any of the exercises "wrong!" Qigong and tai chi are journeys of self-exploration and discovery, not dry repetitions of something your teacher demonstrated for you. Almost all of the moving qigong exercises are based on making some kind of circular movement with the arms combined with deep breathing – invent some of your own!! The meditation is literally about relaxing and being alert while doing nothing – sit down and slow down!

When you have practiced enough that you find yourself wanting more structure to your sessions you can consider some of these issues. As your enjoyment of practicing grows you may want to set aside a specific time(s) each day for your qigong and tai chi. Practicing for even 10 minutes a day is much better than waiting for three days and then trying to practice for 30 minutes. Setting a specific time also helps many folks stay "regular" with their practice. If possible, allow enough time that you can do at least a few moving exercises and also some meditation. It will help you begin to understand the correlation between these two types of practice if you can combine them in each session. It's not about how many times or how many minutes. It's not about how tightly structured your practice or how "hard" you practice. The most important thing is that you bring a relaxed, positive attitude and just do it! Keep in mind that your enjoyment and understanding of these arts will increase in direct proportion to the amount of time you spend engaging them.

In case there are a few of you out there who may be inclined to make your practice schedule too rigid or your exercise too rigorous, a word of advice – "Take it easy!" Remember that tai chi is about balance – mental and physical. Keep this new activity in perspective. Tai chi and qigong are not ends in themselves, but are means to add more energy and enthusiasm to the activities and personal relationships that enrich your life.

When you have a chance, look at the Tips for Nurturing Good Health, Safe and Effective Practice, on the community tai chi website for other ideas on how to approach your training and make effective use of your practice time.

Low Calorie Version:

- 1) Just do it!
- 2) Practice anytime that the spirit moves you!
- 3) Alternate moving and still exercises.
- 4) Relax and enjoy – it's your practice!

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