

The Victory Summit® event: Newly Diagnosed

Tai Chi with Dr. Mike

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Davis Phinney Foundation

Dr. Michael Braitsch, PT, DPT (Owner and Lead Therapist, Tribe Wellness):

Hey everybody, Dr. Mike Braitsch, physical therapist here in Richardson, Texas. And I'm excited to see you. This is something I've been looking forward to through the snowstorms and everything. I'm here for a number of reasons. One, because I love Tai Chi, another, because I'm going to talk with you later about exercise, but my passion for Tai Chi has had been around for a very long time. And I'm so excited to share it with you because I think by the end of our brief introductory lesson, you'll see that Tai Chi, although it is an old Chinese martial art, is still incredibly relevant today. And that's for a few reasons. One, it's a low impact form of exercise. So, it's easier on your knees, your hips, your back than high-impact or high intensity exercise. Another, the second reason I love Tai Chi, especially for people with Parkinson's disease, is it's been heavily researched and validated as an effective way of working over time to improve muscular control, postural control, postural stability, and to improve balance.

That's a very big deal for anyone, for people with Parkinson's disease, as you know, that's even more important deal to stay on top of. And the third reason I love Tai Chi, and the last thing I'll say before we get going is, I love it because in learning a technique over a period of many years, you might find more and more and more layered techniques. So, there's a deep level of cognitive involvement that's helpful for the brain, and along with that comes a nice meditative aspect of, if I'm focused on the movement, and if I'm focused on my breathing during the movements, it's really hard for my mind to wander into other things, like what happened before class, what's going on after class, and a lot of the great mystics of any religion, whether it be Jesus or the Buddha or Muhammad or Moses, all of the great spiritual teachers throughout history have shared with us the idea of the present moment being of utmost importance, and you'll know that you've lost sight of the present moment because the mind will wander during practicing Tai Chi and you'll realize, oh, I'm not doing the technique right at all.

And that allows you to come right back to right now, which some people say is enlightenment and that's way kind of out there. And woo woo, I'll stop with that, but let's start with some exercise and see what you think. And I'll say this too, there's no workout that's more important than your safety. So, my hope, since you're all wherever you are, that you've got a pretty good handle on monitoring your safety. If you want to do some Tai Chi, some of the workouts you may want to hang on to something or maybe even hang on to something hopefully more sturdy than a chair. But if you need a chair, you can do that. Or if you want to do it seated, you can do all of the foot work we're doing

from the chair by scooting to the edge of the chair and leaning that way. So, it's widely applicable.

Anyway, let's get a little bit loose and we'll start getting some techniques. I always like people to start out with some big shoulder rolls, shrugging the shoulders up, rolling them back and down. And that's really helpful as many of you know, because the thoracic spine, the middle of your back gets really stiff. That happens to everyone. And it happens even more so with Parkinson's disease like this or really any type of rotation of the spine can be so helpful. Let's change directions. We won't do a ton of warmups. My hope for you today, though, is after a couple of warmup exercises, we can break into a couple of techniques. And if you like it, there's more out there. There's all of YouTube. There are great resources like the Davis Phinney Foundation's website, which has access to other places where you can pursue this. You might even go to your local community center or YMCA or wherever you go, but let's let the arm be loose here for our next warm up, keep the head up, keep the back up, and we're gently going to turn side to side, letting the arms follow. So just a nice loose movement.

Tai Chi employs a lot of different philosophies of the martial arts. One of which is, we never tried to use force to overcome a problem or an opponent or an attacker. Instead, we use softness and redirect momentum. I know that for a lot of my patients with Parkinson disease, that's really helpful in thinking about the rigidity, the stiffness, or even people who have freezing or festinating of gait. If you can just stop what you're doing, try to really get loose for a moment, take a deep breath, and start over, things go much better. So, we're going to practice deep breathing and I'm going to warn you techniques in Tai-Chi have crazy names. It sounds like I'm making them up. I did not make these up. The first one we're going to do is a very unique technique.

It's what we use to start and end our forms, our choreographed sequence to the movement. And it's called, "Drawing the silk." So, we'll do the arm motions first, push your shoulder blades back and down, so you kind of push your chest out a bit, stretch the crown of your head up and try to soften your knees, just a bit, kind of like a marionette puppet, how it has a string attached to its wrist. We're going to let the wrist lead the motion here, and we're going to draw the wrists up to shoulder height, no higher. You don't need to go higher than that. When you're at shoulder height, turn the palms out and then we're going to lower the arms down. And that's simple enough. Now we're going to let our breathing guide the movement. So, as we slowly breathe in, it's like we're sipping the air rather than engulfing it or inhaling it, we're floating our arms up. Then we're floating the arms back down as we exhale. So, we breathe in little by little, rising up, just to shoulder height and out. Now you might think, I thought this was a martial art, we're just flopping her arms around. And the interesting thing is there's a fighting application to each of the techniques we have here, and some have multiple occasions, but obviously you would need to speed them up.

Tai chi is known for its relaxing movements, which can also be helpful to keep that conscious or intentional focus on movements. I'll talk more about that later, but I think we've got the arm motion down and you can see that's kind of relaxing in and of itself. Let's add if you're standing or seated, let's add a step with it. I wore light shoes so you could see my feet. Hopefully you can see them here on the black tile. We're going to start out, I'll mirror you like you're looking in a strange mirror. So, I'm going to move this leg and I'm going to call it my left. I hope that's not confusing for you. I'm going to pick the left heel up, step out aside without putting much weight in that leg. You keep most of your weight back for a moment. Then as we draw the wrists up, we even out the weight distribution in both feet, palms out and now as we lower the arms, we can sit down into a high squat, lowering your bottom, keeping your head up and back up. To get out of it we draw the wrists back up breathing nice and slowly, slowly step in. And we'll lower the heel and the arms together.

That's, around the world, how you tell people here comes some Tai Chi, this movement. It's the opening of all of our purest movements and forms. Peel up. Step out. Draw the wrists up, breathing in, palms out, keep the head up and back up as we slowly lower down. Drop back up, breathing in. Slowly step in and lower the arms and the heel together. We'll do one more. And then we'll add a little bit. Heel up. Step out. Draw the wrists up. Palms out, sink. From here, let's bring the left palm up in front about midline from the chest and the fingers pointing straight ahead. Let's bring the right arm up behind you like you're holding a tray and if it hurts your shoulder to hold it up high, just drop the elbow a bit. We're going to take this right hand and press forward right over the top of the left.

Then we're going to pull the left hand back to the waist and already you can see, hang on a second. That got a little tricky. There's some coordination involved. This is the kind of thing where the more we do it, the easier it gets. So, let's try right hand palm up, left arm up behind you. The back hand here, presses forward as the front hand pulls back. Flip the front hand up, reach the other arm back. Back hand presses forward, front hand pulls back. Flip up and reach back. If it feels like it's difficult for you, go slower. And if it feels like it's easy for you, try and harmonize the movement so that hands start and finish at the same time. Front hand flips up, other arm reaches back. Press forward and pull back, flip up and reach back. And you might say, "I don't know if I'm doing this right." Don't worry. The doing of it is what makes it get better. Tai Chi can be really simple, but not necessarily easy, but that's why it's so good for your brain. So, we'll do this just a couple more times. We're pressing the backhand forward and pulling the front hand back, flipping up, reaching back, press forward, pull back, flip up, and reach back. Looking at the screen, I see a lot of doing it and I like it. Last, press forward and pull back.

So, that was our second move of the day. First move was stepping out, drawing the silk. Second movement, I haven't told you the name of it yet because it's probably a wild name. It's called "Repulsing the monkey." Repulsing the monkey. These are movements

of the Yang style Tai Chi. Y A N G. Yang style Tai Chi is the most commonly practiced around the world. We're gonna do another movement here. Okay? And this one will be a little simpler. Let's get the arm motion down because the arm motion is quite easy for people. Palms up. We'll scoop up, keeping the elbows nice and relaxed. When we get to shoulder height, point to fingertips forward and press forward. Yeah. Lower the arms down. Let's scoop up slowly as we breathe and point the fingertips forward, press forward, breathing out. One more. In, nice and slowly as we scoop up, breathing out as we press forward. That one, oddly enough is just called "Press full."

So, just a normal name. There's footwork for this one. And the footwork I think is going to help you see part of why this is so helpful for balance. The foot for this one is, we'll take the left leg here. And we're going to step it not just straight ahead, but a little bit wider than your shoulder width, because the wider base of support gives you more stability. So, we stepped out on the heel. So, the heels down, the toes are up and then slowly we sink the hips to shift the weight forward flattening both feet as we bend the front knee and keep the back leg or pretty straight. So, we're in kind of a lunge position here. This is called "Otter Stance," There's no quiz on this. So, if you're overwhelmed by terms, don't worry about it.

We'll sit back like we're sitting on the edge of a chair, pick up the toes and step back. And if it's a little hard to step back, if you're kind of struggling stepping back, just take a shorter step forward. What matters more is the width of the step. So, let's do a few of them. So, a shift over onto the right leg, left foot steps out on the heel. Slowly, roll the foot forward, flattening the feet, pressing the hips forward. Stack. Toes up. Step back. Let's try it with the other leg. We'll shift over now to the left. Right foot steps out on the heel. Roll forward, flattening the feet, sit back, toes up. Step back. Let's do the left foot. Step out, flattening the feet. Hips forward, heads up high, sit back. Toes up. Step back. Other side, step out, roll forward, flattening the feet, rock back, toes up, step back.

And I'm here to tell you anything that's new is challenging for coordination, but we're going to do this. You can do this. We're going to do this. We're going to do that arm motion for press forward and the foot work together and it's going to be smooth. So here we go, palms up, shoulders back, heads up high. Let's scoop up as we shift over to the right leg. Left steps out on the heel. And now the whole time that we roll the foot forward, we're going to press forward. So, we try to harmonize the motion. So, they start together and finish together. Sit back, toes up, step back. Other side. We can do it. We can do it. Breathe in as we step out on the heel, shift forward and press forward. Rock back, toes up, step back. Other side. You can see how slow and controlled movements really bring heightened focus to how you're moving and how your body is moving in space.

And you can see how it takes a lot more control and balance to go slowly with this stuff. And the nice thing about that is through slowly moving and challenging your balance safely, it can improve. And I got to tell you, I don't want to brag too much on my students

because I don't want them to stop taking Tai-Chi and think that they've mastered it. I've got a couple of students in our group, our Parkinson Tai-Chi group who have learned yang 10, the yang 24, the yang 42, the yang sword form, the 99 hands. And what do I mean by all that? I mean, this is just beginning. I've got people who started out struggling with that very movement who can now do crazy kicks without even warming up, who could drop down into the splits in their sixties and seventies people.

This is cool. So, there's no end to what's possible. But let's challenge the brain a little more, and string together what we've done. Okay. So, we'll draw the silk. We'll repulse the monkey once on each side, we'll scoop up and press forward once on each side. And again, I know it's a lot to throw at you in a short period of time, but it'll be fun. And it's just a taste of what's available out there. So, we're standing tall, feet together, feeling great. Deep breath here before we begin, in and out. The left heel comes up. Step out to the side, drawing the silk, wrists come up, palms out, think, breathing out. Left arm up in front, right arm up behind you. Let's press forward and pull back. Then we'll flip up and reach back, press forward and pull back again, arms down low now.

We'll scoop up as we shift the weight into the right leg. Left foot steps out onto the heel. Shift forward and press forward. Rock back, toes up, step back. Other leg. Scoop up and step out, shift forward and press forward. Rock back, step back, lower the arms. We'll draw the silk in reverse. Arms up, heel up, step in and lower. We've got enough time to run it one more time. So, let's give it a go. Because the first time you do it, it feels kind of awkward. We'll do it again. We'll feel even smoother. Repetition is key. Here we go. Standing tall, deep breath in and out.

It's a great day for Tai Chi. Heel up. Step out. Draw the silk. Left arm up in front, right arm up behind you. Let's repulse the monkey. Lower the arms down, scooping up, stepping out, pressing forward, rock back, step back. Other side. Breathing in and out. Coming back. We'll close one with drawing the silk in reverse. Wrists up to shoulder height, stepping in, arms and heel down together. Wonderful. Take a few deep breaths here, reaching out, gathering up all this energy and positivity we're building today. Hopefully this has given you a nice taste of what's available in Tai Chi. We did three movements. We did "Drawing the silk." We did "Repulsing the monkey." And we did "Pressing forward." That's three in the yang style, which is what we practiced today. The full set is 108 postures, so we did three of the 108. So, there's a lot that's out there for you, but I'm sure you're going to get a lot out of today's session. Thank you everyone.

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