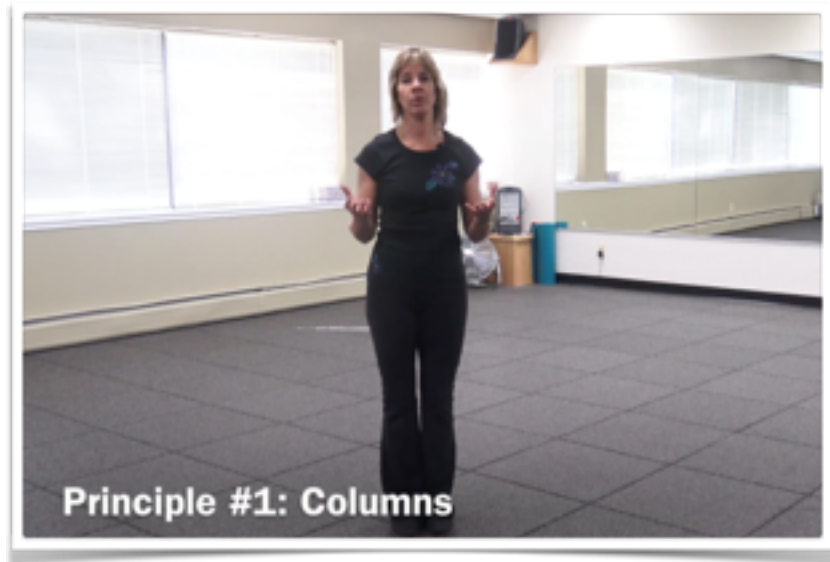




Principle #1: Columns

Setting up your foundations

This principle is really all about correct posture. Just think about your mom putting a book on your head and making you walk across the room without letting the book fall to the floor.

There are three columns that are incorporated in the practice of T'ai Chi. One runs from the top of the head through the center of the body and the other two run from the shoulders through the hips.

It is not a military “ram-rod” straight position . . . it is more of the idea that you are suspended from the ceiling and everything falls naturally into alignment.

Class #1

Focus: Columns/Moving from the dan tian
Postures 1-11

Teaching Points:

In order to keep your columns intact, you must learn to move from the dan tian. Your shoulders must remain above your hips in a relaxed posture. If you allow your shoulders to lead a movement, for example, you end up pushing your shoulders in front of your hips. Try to exaggerate this with pushing chi. Sometimes in order to understand being in alignment, your body needs to feel what it is to be out of alignment. Focus on the plane of motion coming from the dan tian and not from the shoulders. Imagine a circle around your hips and you must move that circle while maintaining correct posture.

Warm ups: 25 minutes

- Step side to side
- Step side to side, holding ball
- Single whip
- Step side to side and kick
- Chi walking
- Part the wild horse's mane
- Brush knee
- Repulse the monkey
- Ward off sequence
- Wave hands like clouds

Form practice: 15 minutes

Using the first 11 postures, focus on moving from the dan tian. Practice with exaggerated movements and breaking your columns.

Cool downs: 5 minutes

- Pushing chi
- Roll the ball
- Ball right to left
- Heaven and earth

Homework: Practice pushing chi and single whip keeping shoulders above hips. Notice your posture when you are simply walking anywhere and try moving from the dan tian.

Class #2

Focus: Columns/Balance and Relaxation
Postures 12-24

Teaching Points:

Keeping your columns intact is ultimately about balance. Think about walking across a balance beam. You must keep your shoulders above your hips and you also have to keep your head up and direct your focus forward. Your posture immediately suffers if you look down . . . and so does your balance.

Warm ups: 25 minutes

- Step side to side
- Step side to side, holding ball
- Wave hands like clouds
- Step side to side and kick
- Chi walking
- Snake creeps, pheasant stands
- Single whip
- Return the tiger to the mountain
- Fair lady works the shuttle into Pick the needle up

Form practice: 15 minutes

As you go through the last segment of the form, focus on keeping your head up and being balanced.

Cool downs: 5 minutes

- Pushing chi
- Roll the ball
- Ball right to left
- Heaven and earth

Homework:

Practice chi walking and keep your focus on the horizon, not on your feet. Practice standing and kicking and notice how your posture affects the height of your kicks and the control you have.

Class #3

Focus: Columns/Relaxation

Postures 1-24

Teaching Points:

As you learn to keep your shoulders above your hips and to move from the dan tian while keeping your focus on the horizon, you should feel a natural relaxation occurring throughout your body. A perfect posture like this allows the right muscles to support your body against the pull of gravity. Again, imagine a string attached to your head and that string allows you to be suspended from the ceiling (not like a noose!). Your body naturally falls into the perfect alignment and everything is relaxed.

Warm ups: 20 minutes

- Step side to side
- Step side to side, holding ball
- Wave hands like clouds
- Step side to side and kick
- Chi walking
- Snake creeps, pheasant stands
- Single whip
- Ward off, grasp the birds tail
- Part the wild horses mane
- Fair lady works the shuttle into Pick the needle up

Form practice: 20 minutes

Complete the entire form 4 times. The first time through, focus on moving from the dan tian and keeping the shoulders above the hips. The second time, focus on keeping your head up and your eyes on the horizon. The third and fourth time, focus on the feeling of relaxation that your body can achieve when you maintain perfect posture.

Cool Downs: 5 minutes

Pushing chi

Roll the ball

Breathing in and out (up and down)

Heaven and earth

Homework:

Practice the ward off sequence with a focus on maintaining your columns and feeling completely relaxed.