

TAIGALATES

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Taigalates is a new programme developed to answer the thrust in fitness circles towards a more integrated approach to fitness, where when undertaking exercise, there is a greater connection between mind, movement and breath so that the one doing exercise is in tune with the body and breath, thus causing more enhanced overall benefits to the body and mind, and consequently the general health, and at the same time reducing the possibilities of injury, which is always a possibility when one exercises inappropriately.

Taigalates is a programme which integrates the mind body techniques of three famous mind body programmes including Tai Chi, Yoga and Pilates. If you cannot decide which of these three major disciplines to follow, then start Taigalates where you will learn the main basic techniques of all three, using the most effective aspects of all three disciplines.

TAI CHI

This is one of the martial arts and is closely related to Qi Gong which is one of the eight branches of Chinese Medicine. Qi Gong, like Tai Chi, Yoga and Pilates, use the concept of contracting the “Core” muscles which produce spinal stability which is a safe position from which other exercises, especially those involving the appendicular skeleton may begin. It is this centrality of a beginning stable point, where the spine has integrity, which is the basis of our grouping these apparently diverse traditions together as Taigalates.

Tai Chi provides the following benefits:-

1. It supports your body
2. It massages your internal organs, thus helping your liver
3. It stretches your body
4. By working at 70% of your capacity, you can always work the next day, and do not need time for recovery.
5. It is useful in pain management. Many of you have done Dr Paul Lam’s courses for managing arthritis and back pain. Taigalates can then be added to your existing skills.
6. It provides the other general benefits of exercise and joint mobility including prevention of falls, better posture, helps towards regulation of blood pressure, greater sense of wellbeing as well as other general benefits.

There are different styles of Tai Chi, the Chen style being the most explosive, and difficult to remember. In this initial course, we will use the Wu style, with its need for smaller knee bends, and its usefulness in the warm up phase of Taigalates.

Basic concepts

1. **Chi:** The Chinese differentiate between external energy, and internal energy which they call Chi. They believe blockages of Chi flow around the body can Cause disease, and pain in muscles. The abdomen below the umbilicus is the storehouse of 'Tan Tien' where the channels of Chi pass through. It is like a central station. When we are depleted of Chi, or if the Chi is blocked and fails to flow, we are depleted of energy and well being, and may become sick. Chi is abundant at birth, and is depleted at death. Tai Chi claims to replenish this tendency for depletion of Chi, thus warding off ill health and old age. Correct posture during Tai Chi is necessary to facilitate the flow of Chi.
2. **Posture:** Correct posture requires the following:-
 - Body relaxed and firmly held
 - Head held as though suspended by a cord from above i.e. stretching out the body. Chin is pulled in slightly.
 - Shoulders relaxed. Chest sunk, but not rounded.
 - Hips tilted forward slightly by tucking in the tail a little, thus straightening the lower back.
 - Knees unlocked, and ever so slightly bent.
 - Stand straight, neither forward nor back, with weight evenly distributed over both feet.
 - Do not move a foot until the other foot takes up all the weight.
3. **Opening Stance:** This pose is used at the beginning and in between many sequences, and is a relaxed pose..
 - Similar to general posture, but feet are shoulder-width apart, weight evenly distributed over both feet, knees slightly bent, feet pointing straight ahead.
 - Pelvic position as above
 - Shoulders relaxed, arms hanging loosely by the side.
 - Head position as above with extension of spine by imaginary string suspending the head and pulling it up. Chin slightly tucked in, thus straightening the back of the neck, shoulders relaxed.
4. **Breathing:** Correct breathing is an essential accompaniment of Tai Chi as it is of Yoga and Pilates.
 - Abdominal breathing, with abdomen rising and falling with each breath.
 - The in breath is associated with opening movements, and the outbreath is associated with closing movements.
5. **Tai Chi Hand:** The hands project the Chi outwards, with the eyes following the leading hand.
 - Hands open and relaxed. Tense hands block Chi flow.
 - Finger slightly curved, but nearly straight.
 - Warmth signifies the presence of Chi in the hand.

Opening Form

This is a modified Chen opening, with Wu high horse stance knees.

1. Adopt the starting position, spine erect facing ahead.
2. Drop your spine and place all the weight onto the right leg, with knee slightly bent, step to the left so feet are shoulder width apart.
3. Slowly draw 50% weight back onto the left leg. Lift both arms by raising the elbows forward. This is done on an inbreath, and the movement is begun centrally and that force is transmitted out through the fingers. During this movement, the legs are straightened to the knees unlocked position. Feel the chi flowing from your feet through the centre of your body up to the crown of your head, and out through the finger tips.
4. Relax your shoulders and let your elbows drop, with the wrists hanging naturally. Sink the wrists allowing the fingers to float up with the palms open and forward. Relax your whole being. This is done on an outbreath.
5. Let hands flat down, with arms slightly lifted, and elbows slightly forward. The spine drops.

Note: Some authorities state that 60% weight should be on the left foot and 40% on the right foot. However, we are teaching 50% weight on each foot.

White Crane Spreads Its Wings

Cranes are symbols of longevity in Chinese philosophy.

1. Pivot weight around 90 degrees to left with right foot facing forwards, and left foot facing 90 degrees to left.
2. Sink all the weight onto the right leg, whilst right arm begins to float upwards. Left hand arcs to the left. Left heel is lifted slightly, and left foot is drawn towards the body.
3. Step forward with the left foot into the cat stance, with the ball of the left foot and your whole right foot on the ground.
4. Keeping weight on the back right foot, left foot active, legs straighten a little. Left hand drops to the left, hand turned out from the body, right hand rotates up and out. Weight 90% on right leg, and 10% on left.
5. Rotate to front arms back to side, feet to front and shoulder width apart, adopting the beginning phase, and repeat on the opposite side.

YOGA

Yoga is a way of bringing us to living in the present moment, or arriving at a state of mindfulness, where we are 100% present in the current moment, and are not living in the past or worrying about the future, but are present totally in the present moment. There are many described ways of achieving this, but for the purposes of this first taste into Taigalates, we will teach the asanas or poses of the third limb of Patanjali's eight limbs of yoga, in the form of the Sun Salutations.

The form of yoga we teach stresses function over form, where the spine has integrity, and must be attended to before precision of any movements of the appendicular skeleton is attempted. We start with the sun salutations as these movements have been used throughout the centuries to provide forward and backward movement of the spine.

Chest to Belly Breathing

This is the method described by TKV Desikachar, son of T Krishnamacharya a modern father of many popular forms of yoga including that of BKS Iyengar (his uncles) and that of Patabi Jois (Ashtanga Yoga). It will be detailed below.

Breath/Movement Relationship

In this method, each movement is commenced by a breath, then the movement starts, and the movement is completed whilst still breathing, and the breath continues a little longer.

This is described graphically in the following diagram.



Larry Payne of Yoga Rx states that we should think about the breath as though it is a wave in the ocean, and the movement as though it is the surfer. The surfer collects the wave that has already started, does the surf, and the waves continue even after the surfer has landed.

Two Part (Chest to Belly) Breathing

This method is described by TKV Desikachar, and it is required to be used throughout the whole of the asana practice.

- Lie on your back on the floor with knees bent and upright, with one hand on your chest, and the other hand on your abdomen.
- On an inbreath feel first the chest, rising and finally the abdomen rising.
- On an outbreath contract the abdomen first, then notice the chest contract next.
- Therefore on an inbreath, the movement or expansion is up down, and on an outbreath the movement or contraction is down up.
- Hence, whenever an asana is attempted such as raising the arms above the head, the breath starts first before the arms are raised, then the arms are raised whilst still breathing, the arm movement finished and then the breath finishes. This is done whilst observing the two part breathing.

Ujjayi (Victorious) Breathing (“loud breathing”)

Whilst air is breathed in and out through both nostrils, the glottis is partly closed thus producing a slight snoring sound.

To get the idea of this breath – with the mouth open, make the sound of the consonant “h”, and this gives the general sound. Now achieve this sound with the mouth closed, breathing only through the nostrils.

This form of breathing is used during asana practice together with the two part breathing, and it is a distinctive characteristic of the method taught in Taigalates for the yoga part of the practice.

Sun Salutations

1. Mountain pose with hands in greeting position.

- Weight evenly distributed over both feet
- Knees and hips stacked over ankles.
- Transversus sucked in
- Spine neutral and elongated
- Hand palms together in greeting position

2. Swaying back mountain

- On an inbreath raise arms above the head, palms facing
- Still on an inbreath perform a backbend by raising the sternum, opening the front of the chest widely, welcoming the day

3. Forward bend

- On an outbreath, bend forward, at first keeping a straight back, and then folding in towards the knees
- Place the hands at a comfortable position either on the floor, the lower legs
- Bend the knees if necessary. The spine must have priority with straight back initially which is folded finally, not folded throughout.

4. Right lunge

- On an inbreath, step the right foot backwards into a lunge
- Hands are placed initially on either side of the feet before the lunge

5. Down Dog

- On an outbreath take the right foot back level to the left foot and shoulder width apart.
- Raise the buttocks high into the air

- Bring the shoulder blades together, thus rolling out the shoulders and opening the chest
- Bring the chest towards the thigh
- Bend the knees if the spine tends to round.
- Remember the spine must have priority and remain uncurved backwards as this is a backward bend of the spine, even though in part it is a forward bend.

6. Up Dog

- On an inbreath, drop the hips towards the floor, though not on the floor
- Move the chest forwards and open it out. Think of your dog stretching itself
- Stretch the front of the neck whilst allowing the head to drop back if sufficient flexibility persists. This is a proud position where the chest is arched forward

7. Down dog

- On an outbreath swing back into down dog and observe the criteria described before.

8. Lunge

- On an inbreath, bring the right foot back between both hands
- If this is too difficult, then drop the left knee to the floor to facilitate the movement.

9. Forward Bend

- On an outbreath bring the left foot forward level with the right foot
- Gradually bring the head towards the front of the lower leg
- Bend the knees if necessary

10. Swaying back mountain

- On an inbreath, lift the arms up forwards whilst straightening the legs, and finally the arms by the ears with palms facing in
- The sternum is lifted
- Finally a back bend stretches out to the fullest.

11. Mountain with hands in greeting position.

- On an outbreath return to erect position with palms together in front of chest in greeting position.

Repeat on the other side.

This represents one full round of sun salutation. As many rounds as possible can be done to build up stamina. For those less fit, a few breaths can be taken in each pose.

This sequence of poses is called a **Vinyasa** (sequence) where a sequence is combined with the breath, which is ujjayi, and combined with the two part breath throughout. You will have to emphasise the components, because in the beginning, participants will forget components of the sequence.

PILATES

Pilates was started by Joseph Pilates who was born in Düsseldorf, Germany in 1880. As a child he was weak and sickly, and as he grew up he studied Eastern and Western methods of strengthening the body, and developed systems to strengthen his own body which he then taught others. In 1914, he had moved to England and was teaching his self-defence methods to the police. Unfortunately, war broke out and he was interned on the Isle of Man, as he was German. This did not stop him, and he taught his method to inhabitants of the Isle of Man who fared better than others during the influenza epidemic during his time on the Isle. He returned to Germany and taught the police in Hamburg, but as the country became unsettled he moved to America after having started his work with dancers.

Pilates tried to develop a body that would not let you down, and encouraged the strength and fluidity of the childhood body. He tried to correct bad postural habits, and emphasised taking control of one's body which he called contrology. This form of exercise is open to people of all ages. It emphasises strengthening the core, which is so prevalent in exercise theory today. Strength and control are important in this method, as is balance and stability, together with postural alignment and a mind-body connection with the appropriate use of the breath.

Eight Principles of Pilates

1. Concentration

It is important that there is integration of body and mind, and that one is present in the exercise in a similar way to yoga's mindfulness.

2. Control

The brain must control the muscle action and be present in the action, causing the correct intensity and precision of movement.

3. Centre/Core training

This central core which is so much in vogue now was conceptualised by Pilates as the 'body's powerhouse'. All movement is generated from this area. An active and strong core is necessary, and in this method as in yoga, the spine has priority.

4. Breath

This method encourages lateral breathing. In this way the diaphragm and the abdomen are used as well as the upper chest. There is to be no breath holding, and

breathing is to occur throughout the movement. Usually, an outbreath occurs with folding down movement, and an inbreath occurs with opening out movements, in the same way as it does in yoga. The lower ribs act in a bucket handle way, and much more of the lungs is filled up with each breath.

5. Fluidity

Each movement follows the other in a fluid way. This may take some time to achieve, but is similar to yoga vinyasa.

6. Precision

Each movement is to be carried out precisely, and is not to be an approximation.

7. Routine

The sequence is to be repeated both in the mind and physically so that it becomes automatic.

8. Isolation

This is a first step to integration, and is only used at the beginning of the exercise.

BACK AND WAIST STRETCH

- Sit cross-legged on a mat, stretch the right arms up to the sky with the left hand on the left knee.
- Open up the fingers of the right hand
- On an inbreath clasp the right wrist with the left hand
- On an outbreath lean over to the left with both sit bones still on the floor, stretching as much as possible. This is assisted by a slight pull.
- On an inbreath return to vertical with both hands on their respective knees.
- Repeat on the other side.

ROLL DOWN ROLL UP

- Be seated on mat, knees bent, feet flat, transversus abdominus engaged.
- Tuck the pelvis under thus rounding the back, and continue rounding the back down towards the floor
- When your feet want to lift, or you might collapse, reverse the movement in an outbreath.
- With further strength development, you will be able to go down closer to the ground, retain the transversus contraction and keep the feet on the floor.
- Do not go any further than touching your shoulder blades onto the floor.

CONCLUSION

This completes our first short sample of our new programme Taigalates. Remember, all exercise programmes should be commenced with a warm up, and finished with a cool down. We have many brilliant Taigalates warm ups and cool downs, but they are beyond the scope of this introductory workshop. Hopefully, you will be interested enough to complete our two day workshop of accreditation in this method for which we are applying for 15 CEC points.