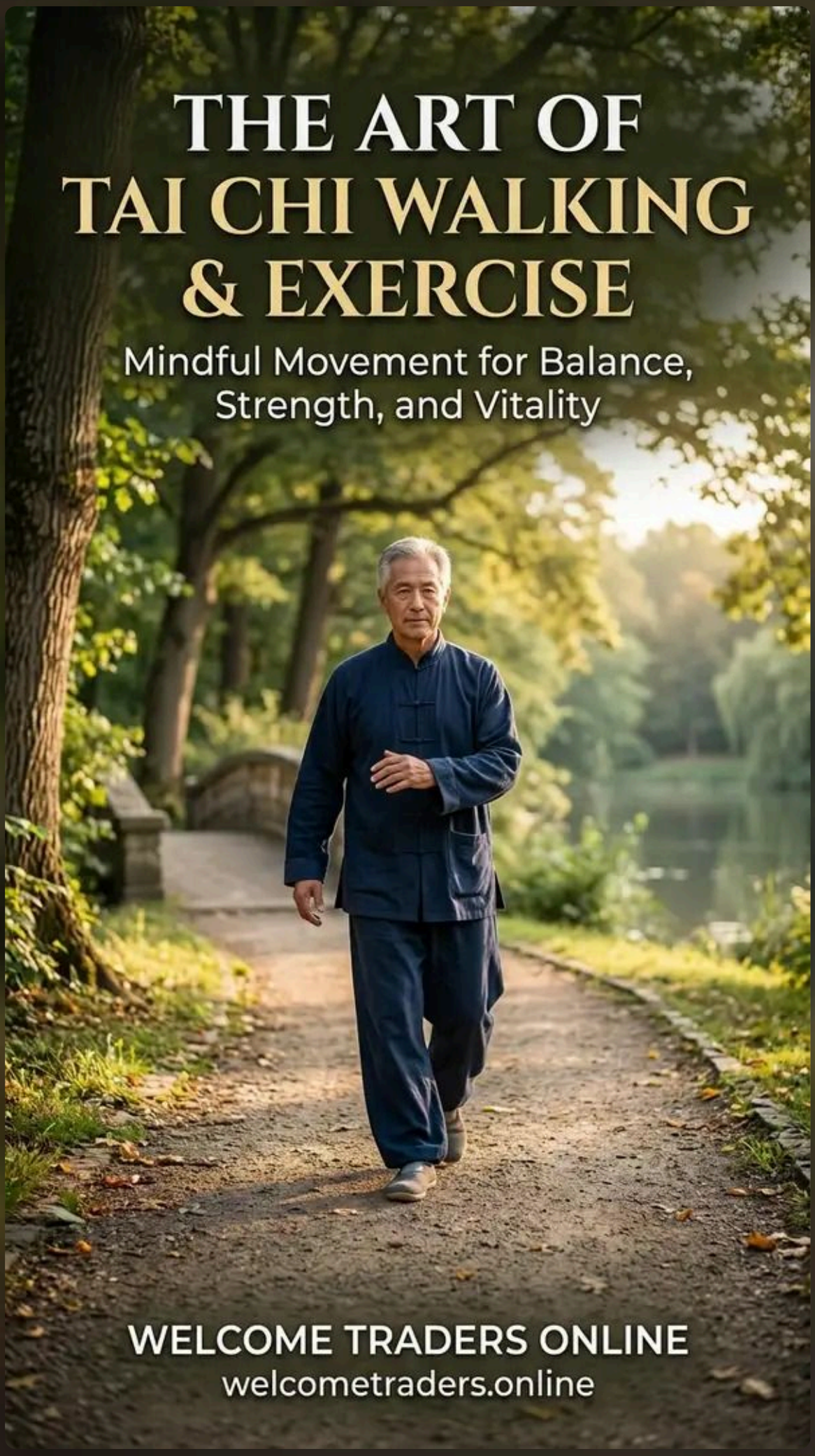
THE ART OF
TAI CHI WALKING
& EXERCISE
Mindful Movement for Balance,
Strength, and Vitality
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A WELCOME TRADERS ILLUSTRATED GUIDE

The Art of Tai Chi Walking & Exercise

Mindful movement for balance, strength and vitality. The complete beginner's guide to walking meditation and gentle daily movement.

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How to use this book. Read pages 3–5 once, then learn one step per day. Pages 12 and 16 are made to be printed and kept beside you while you practise.

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This guide is general wellness information, not medical advice. See the safety notes on page 15.

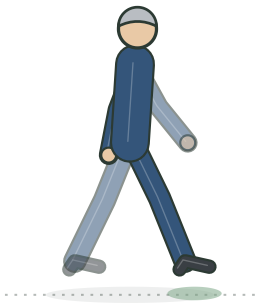
CHAPTER 1

What Is Tai Chi Walk?

Tai Chi Walk is a slow, weight-shifting walking meditation drawn from Tai Chi Chuan, the Chinese internal art often described as “meditation in motion”.

Instead of hurrying from one place to the next, you move your body weight completely from one leg to the other before every step. The spine stays upright and relaxed, the knees stay soft, and each movement follows your breath. The result is a walk that trains balance, leg strength and calm attention at the same time.

You do not need to learn a full Tai Chi form to benefit. The walk takes the most useful elements of Tai Chi footwork and turns them into a practice you can do in a hallway, a garden or a quiet park in five to twenty minutes a day.



Normal walk: weight falls forward



Tai Chi Walk: front foot touches down empty

	Ordinary walk	Tai Chi Walk
Pace	Brisk, automatic	Very slow, deliberate
Weight	Falls forward onto each foot	Shifts fully from one leg to the other
Foot placement	Heel lands with weight on it	Heel touches down empty, then weight arrives
Knees	Mostly straight	Softly bent, body slightly lowered
Breath	Unnoticed	Slow, natural and matched to movement
Attention	On where you are going	On how you are moving, right now

CHAPTER 2

Why Practise? The Benefits

Tai Chi is one of the most studied gentle exercises. Research reviews have linked regular Tai Chi practice with better balance and fewer falls in older adults, along with improvements in leg strength, flexibility and wellbeing.

Tai Chi Walk focuses on exactly the elements behind those benefits: slow single-leg balance, soft knees and calm breathing.

Balance & steadiness

Standing on one leg while the other moves trains the small stabilising muscles around the ankles, knees and hips.

Leg & core strength

Moving slowly with softly bent knees builds endurance in the thighs and hips without jarring impact.

Calm, focused mind

Matching slow breathing to slow movement gives the mind one simple thing to follow, which many people find calming.

Kind to the joints

There is no jumping or pounding. Steps are placed gently, which suits people who find running uncomfortable.

Better posture

Practising an upright, relaxed spine every day carries over into how you stand and sit.

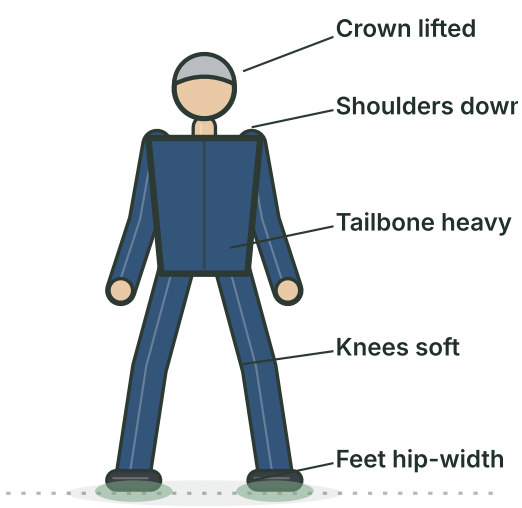
Practise anywhere

No equipment, no special clothing and very little space. Ten slow steps in a corridor is already a session.

Small and often wins. Ten minutes a day, most days of the week, does more than one long session on the weekend. The benefits build gradually over weeks of regular practice.

CHAPTER 3

Before You Begin



The Tai Chi posture

Posture checklist

- **Head:** imagine a thread lifting the crown of your head. Chin slightly tucked.
- **Shoulders:** relaxed and dropped, elbows heavy.
- **Chest:** soft, not puffed out.
- **Lower back:** long, as if your tailbone is gently heavy.
- **Knees:** softly bent, pointing the same way as your toes.
- **Feet:** about hip-width apart, weight spread over the whole foot.
- **Eyes:** looking ahead, not down at your feet.

Space

A clear, flat path of 4–6 metres: a hallway, patio or quiet park path. Remove rugs and clutter.

Clothing

Loose clothes. Flat, flexible shoes, or bare feet on a soft, non-slip floor.

Time

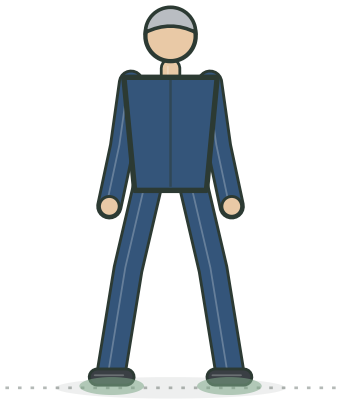
Start with 5–10 minutes. Any time of day works; many people like early morning or evening.

Safety first. Practise beside a wall, counter or sturdy chair until your balance feels steady. Stop if you feel dizzy, short of breath or have pain. If you have a balance disorder, recent surgery, severe joint problems or a heart condition, ask your doctor before starting.

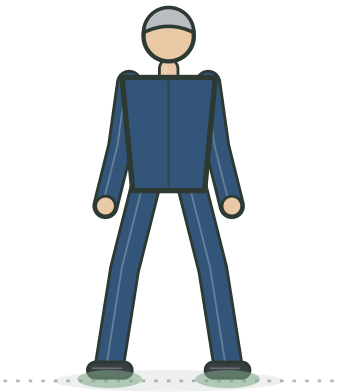
STEP 1

Wu Chi: The Centred Root

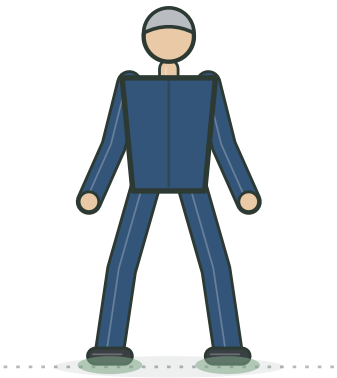
Every Tai Chi walk begins and ends in Wu Chi, the calm, centred standing posture. It teaches you where your balance lives before you start to move.



1. Stand tall, feet together



2. Step to hip-width



3. Soften knees, sink slightly

How to do it

1. Stand with your feet together, arms resting at your sides.
2. Shift your weight to the right foot and place the left foot out to hip-width. Settle evenly onto both feet.
3. Soften your knees and let your body sink one or two centimetres, as if sitting on a tall stool.
4. Run through the posture checklist from page 5, then breathe slowly through your nose.
5. Stay here for 1–2 minutes, feeling your weight spread evenly through both feet.

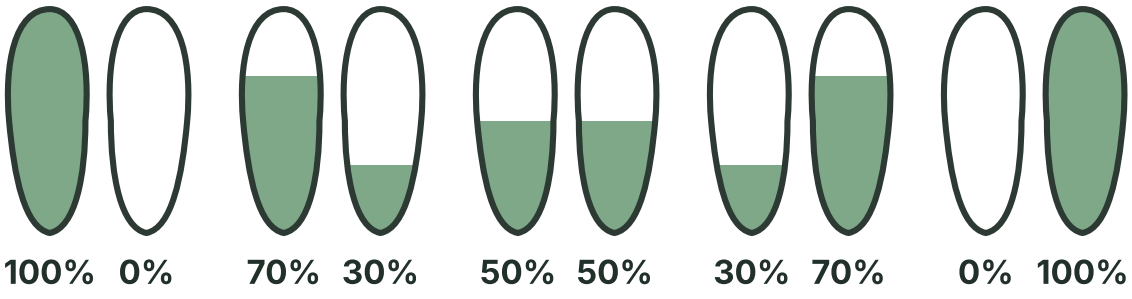
"Stand like a tree: rooted below, light and tall above."

Check yourself: you should be able to rise onto your toes or lean slightly in any direction and come back to centre easily. If not, sink a little less.

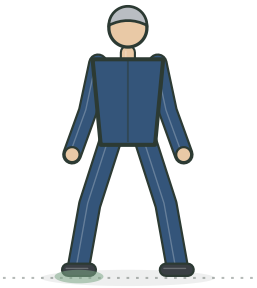
STEP 2

Weight Shifting: Filling & Emptying

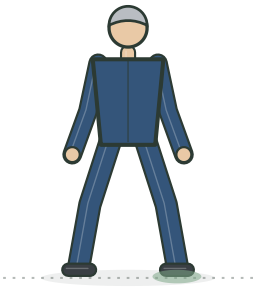
This is the heart of Tai Chi Walk. One leg becomes “full” (carrying your weight) while the other becomes “empty”. Learning to move between them slowly is what builds balance and strength.



Weight moving from the left foot to the right foot: 100 / 0 → 70 / 30 → 50 / 50 → 30 / 70 → 0 / 100



Left leg full, right leg empty



Right leg full, left leg empty

How to do it

1. Start in Wu Chi with soft knees.
2. Slowly move your weight onto the left leg, as if pouring water from one jug into another. Keep your hips level and your head at the same height.
3. When the right foot feels light enough to lift, pause for one breath.
4. Pour the weight back through the middle and over to the right leg. Repeat 10 times side to side.
5. Then stand with one foot a small step ahead and shift forward and back.

“Pour, don’t push. The head glides; it never bobs up and down.”

STEP 3

The Empty Step (Cat Step)

Most stumbles happen because we fall onto the front foot. In Tai Chi you place the foot first, with no weight on it, and only then move your weight forward. Like a cat testing the ground, you stay in control at every moment.



1. Sink onto the back leg



2. Place the heel, empty



3. Roll forward, then shift

How to do it

1. Stand with your weight fully on your right leg, knee softly bent.
2. Lift the empty left foot and move it forward slowly, a short half-step.
3. Touch the heel down lightly, toes raised. There is no weight on it yet; you could still lift it away.
4. Lower the toes so the whole foot is flat, then slowly shift your weight forward into the left leg.
5. When the left leg is full, the right heel lifts naturally. Bring the right foot forward to make the next empty step.

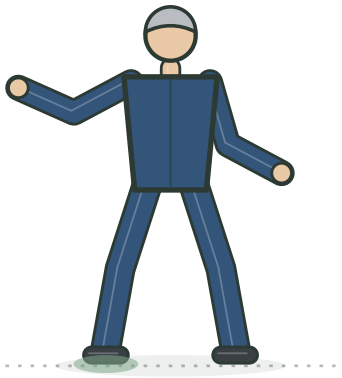
"Step as if walking on thin ice: place first, trust second."

Keep steps short. Long steps pull you off balance. A half-step that you can control is worth more than a big one you fall into.

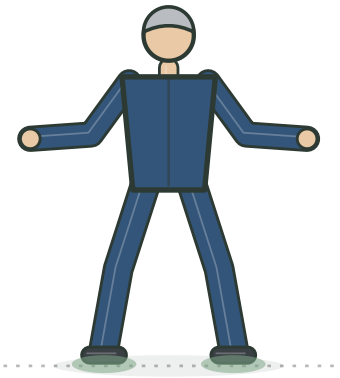
STEP 4

Cloud Hands While Walking

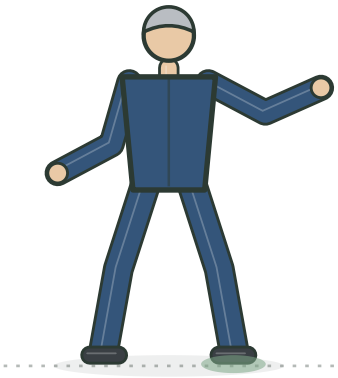
Once the empty step feels steady, add the arms. Cloud Hands is a soft, circling arm movement that keeps the upper body relaxed and links the turning of the waist to each step.



Waist turns, right hand rises



Hands pass in front



Left hand rises, weight follows

How to do it

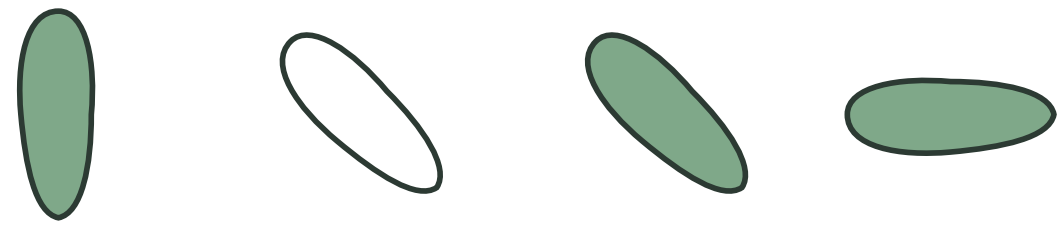
1. Begin walking with empty steps, hands relaxed at hip height.
2. As you sink onto the left leg, let one hand float up in front of the face, palm facing you, while the other drifts down in front of the belly.
3. Turn the waist gently toward the full leg; the hands travel with the waist, not on their own.
4. As the weight moves to the other leg, the hands swap: the upper hand floats down and the lower one rises.
5. Keep elbows heavy and shoulders down. The hands move like clouds: slow, round and unhurried.

"The waist turns the hands; the legs carry the waist."

STEP 5

Turning & Changing Direction

At the end of your path you need to turn without twisting the knee. The rule is simple: **only ever turn a foot that is empty.**



1. Weight back 2. Turn empty toes 3. Shift onto it 4. Match it

Turning to the left in two 45° pivots, seen from above. Green shows where the weight is.

How to do it

1. Finish a step with your weight on the back leg so the front foot is empty.
2. Lift the front toes and pivot that foot on its heel about 45° in the direction you want to turn.
3. Lower the toes and shift your weight onto the turned foot.
4. Now the other foot is empty: lift it, turn it to match, and set it down hip-width apart.
5. Repeat with another 45° turn if needed, settle in Wu Chi for one breath, and walk back.

> **Protect your knees.** Never twist on a foot that is carrying weight. If the knee feels any strain, turn in smaller steps.

"Empty the foot, then turn it. Weight follows the toes."

CHAPTER 5

Breathing With Every Step

Breath is what turns slow walking into meditation. Breathe gently through the nose and let one full breath cycle carry you through one step.



Phase	Breath	What the body does
1. Settle	Exhale	Sink softly onto the full leg; shoulders and belly relax.
2. Lift	Inhale	Lift the empty foot and move it forward; the body stays tall.
3. Place	Brief pause	The heel touches down with no weight. Check your balance.
4. Shift	Exhale	Lower the toes and pour your weight forward into the new leg.

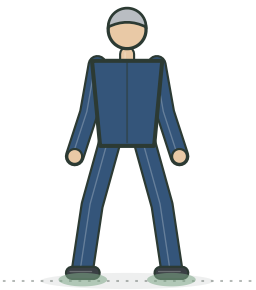
Never force it. If the movement is slower than your breath, simply take an extra natural breath. Comfortable, quiet breathing matters more than perfect timing.

CHAPTER 6 · PRINT THIS PAGE

The Full 8-Step Sequence

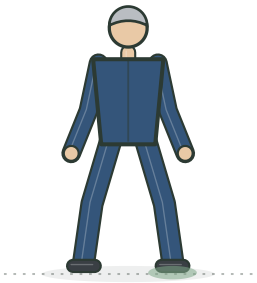
Put everything together. Each number is one slow movement; one complete cycle (1–8) usually takes two or three breaths per foot. Walk 6–10 steps, turn (page 10), and walk back.

1



Stand in Wu Chi

2



Sink onto the right leg

3



Lift the left foot

4



Place the heel, empty

5



Lower the toes

6



Shift weight forward

7



Draw the back foot in

8



Repeat on the other side

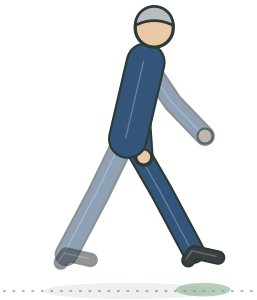
"Slow is smooth. Smooth is steady."

CHAPTER 7

Common Mistakes & Easy Fixes

Everyone makes these at first. Pick one to watch for in each session rather than trying to fix everything at once.

If you notice...	Try this
Falling onto the front foot	Place the heel empty first. You should be able to lift it away again before shifting.
Bobbing up and down	Keep the knees equally bent and imagine your head sliding along a shelf.
Steps too long	Shorten to a half-step. Width hip-apart, length about one foot.
Holding the breath	Breathe through the nose and slow down. Relaxed breathing comes first.
Raised, tense shoulders	Every few steps, exhale and let the shoulders and elbows drop.
Looking at the feet	Look ahead at eye level. Your feet will learn the way by feel.
Knees collapsing inward	Keep knees pointing over the toes; widen the stance slightly.
Locking the knees	Keep a gentle bend at all times, even when standing still.



× Leaning and lunging forward



✓ Upright, short, controlled step

CHAPTER 8

Your 7-Day Starter Plan

A gentle first week that adds one new skill each day. After day 7, simply repeat the full practice daily and slowly extend the time toward 15–20 minutes.

Day	Focus	Practice	Time
Day 1	**Posture & Wu Chi**	Learn the posture checklist. Stand in Wu Chi 3 × 1 minute.	5 min
Day 2	**Weight shifting**	Side-to-side shifts, 3 sets of 10. Use a wall for support.	8 min
Day 3	**The empty step**	Empty steps holding a counter or wall, 10 per leg.	8 min
Day 4	**Walking + breath**	Slow empty-step walking along your path with the 4-phase breath.	10 min
Day 5	**Turning**	Walk 6 steps, turn safely, walk back. Repeat 4 times.	10 min
Day 6	**Cloud hands**	Add Cloud Hands to your walk for the last 5 minutes.	12 min
Day 7	**Full practice**	Wu Chi → full 8-step sequence → Wu Chi to close.	15 min

Tick off each day

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Missed a day? No problem. Just continue where you left off. Consistency over weeks matters far more than a perfect streak.

CHAPTER 9

Questions & Safety Notes

Is Tai Chi walking good for beginners?

Yes. It is low-impact, needs no equipment and can be done at any pace. Start with support nearby and short sessions.

How long should a session last?

Start with 5–10 minutes a day and build toward 15–20 minutes as it feels comfortable.

Do I need special shoes?

No. Flat, flexible shoes, or bare feet on a soft, non-slip surface, work best. Avoid heels and thick, rigid soles.

Indoors or outdoors?

Both. Indoors is easier to start; a quiet, level outdoor path adds fresh air and a natural focus.

Can older adults practise?

Many do. Practise next to a wall or chair, keep steps short, and check with your doctor if you have a balance condition.

When will I notice a difference?

Many people feel calmer straight away. Balance and leg strength improve gradually over several weeks of regular practice.

Please read before practising

- Consult a doctor first if you have a balance disorder, dizziness, recent surgery, severe joint problems, osteoporosis with fracture risk, a heart condition, or are pregnant.
- Always practise on a clear, level, non-slip surface with support within reach.
- Stop immediately if you feel pain, dizziness, chest discomfort or shortness of breath.
- This guide is general wellness information and does not replace advice from a medical professional or a qualified Tai Chi instructor.

QUICK REFERENCE CARD · PRINT & KEEP

Tai Chi Walk in One Page

1 · Root
Wu Chi: feet hip-width, knees soft, crown lifted, shoulders down.

2 · Shift
Pour weight fully onto one leg. Head level, hips level.

3 · Empty step
Heel touches down with no weight. Place first, then trust.

4 · Cloud hands
Waist turns the hands; elbows heavy, movement round.

5 · Turn
Only turn an empty foot, about 45° at a time.

Breath
Settle (out) · Lift (in) · Place (pause) · Shift (out).

"Move slowly. Breathe deeply.
Let every step be a small meditation."

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