

# GREAT STRETCHING / LIGAMENT STRENGTHENING EXERCISES WHETHER OR NOT YOU PRACTICE TAI CHI . . .

Be especially respectful of any injuries, chronic problems, or physical limitations you may have. When you are kind and gentle to your body, it starts to trust you and begins to relax by itself. You will find yourself starting to loosen up on a deeper level without having to force the issue. In this way you will develop naturally, gradually, and safely.

In Tai Chi you learn to reorganize the way in which you move. In particular, you discover how to coordinate all of your movements from your center and how to use the power of the waist and the lower tan tien to move in a strong, stable, integrated way. You will see that many of the warm-up movements focus on training the waist for this reason.

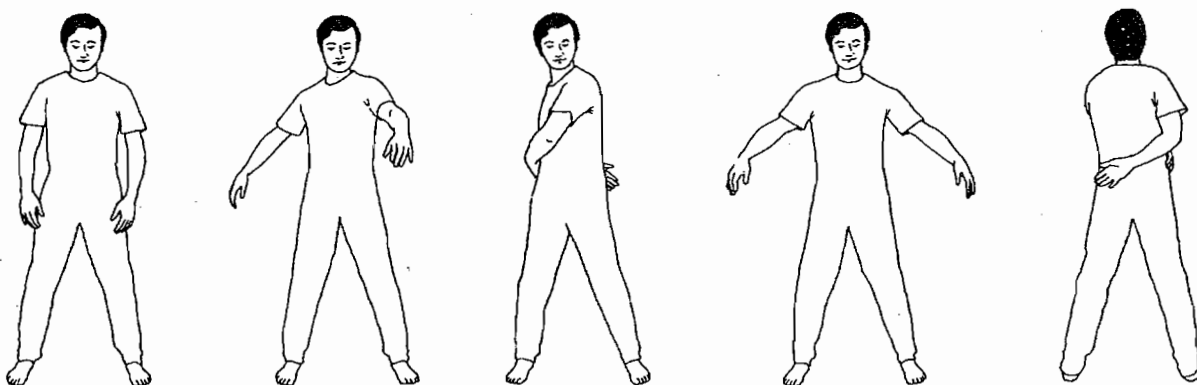


Fig. 4.1 Waist Loosening

## Waist Loosening

1. Stand with the feet parallel, slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Allow the arms to dangle loosely at your sides.
2. Begin to turn the hips from side to side. Let the arms swing naturally and easily with the momentum of the hips turning. Explore your natural and comfortable range of hip motion. Don't go to extremes; just stay within your free and easy comfort zone.
3. After turning just the hips ten or twelve times, allow the lumbar vertebrae to relax and loosen and gently twist with the hips. You should still begin the movement from the hips, but now allow the lumbar vertebrae to respond as well.
4. Next allow the middle spine, upper back, and neck to twist gently with the movement.
5. Keep the shoulders loose and let the arms swing with the movement. Don't use effort to move the arms; let them be totally limp and just let the

body swing them. At the same time, be aware of the gentle twisting of the knee and ankle joints as you twist the whole body. Do this at least thirty-six times to each side.

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1.

## Opening the Door of Life

1. Begin in the same stance as for Waist Loosening. This time twist to the left, again initiating the movement from the hips. Let the right arm swing across the front of the torso, raising it up to head height with the palm facing away from you. At the same time, let the left arm swing around to the back and place the back of the left hand over the Door of Life, the area on the spine opposite the navel.
2. When you reach your full extension, relax, and then extend again by loosening the lower back. Feel the gentle stretch and increased extension coming all the way from the Door of Life, not from the shoulders. Relax and extend in this way three times.
3. Twist to the right and repeat the steps as above on the right side. Repeat for a total of nine times on each side.

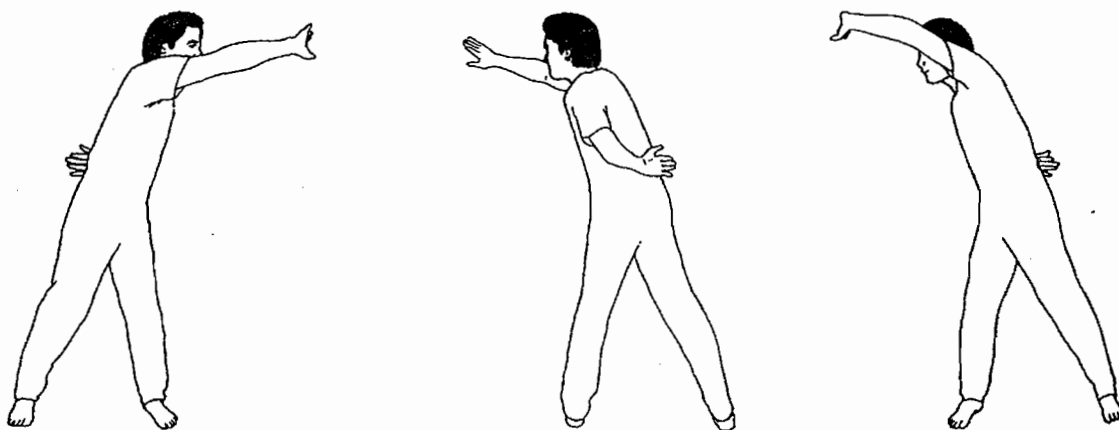


Fig. 4.2 Opening the Door of Life



## Windmill Exercise: Opening the Spinal Joints

Practice each phase of this exercise slowly and mindfully.

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### Outer Front Extension

1. Begin in the same stance as for Waist Loosening. Bring the hands to the midline of the body and hook the thumbs together.

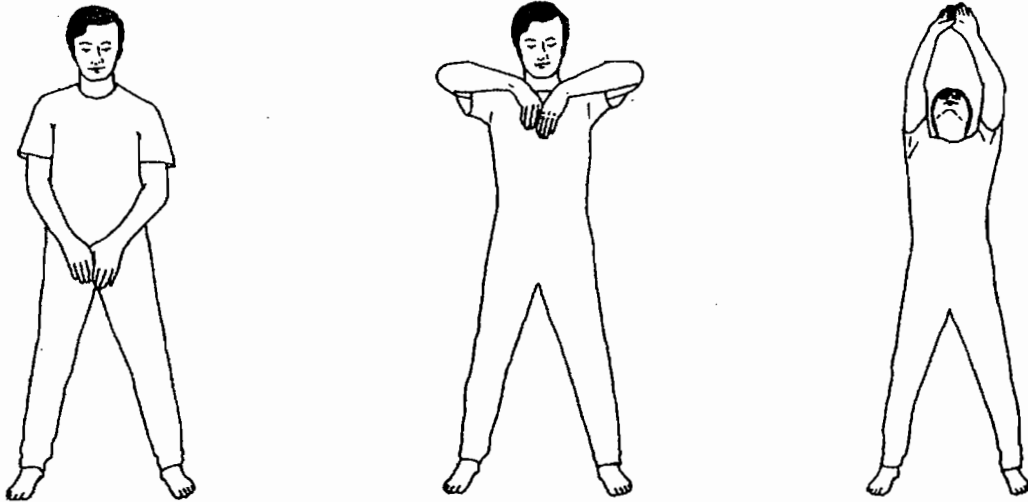


Fig. 4.3 Windmill Exercise opening position

2. Keeping the hands close to the torso, inhale and raise the arms until they are extended straight up over the head, the fingers pointing up. Gently stretch upward in this position, extending the spine slightly backward. You can even say “Ah-h-h-h-h,” as you would when you stretch first thing in the morning.
3. Begin to exhale slowly and bend forward, reaching as far out in front as you can, keeping the head between the arms. Try to feel the joints of the spine releasing one by one in a wavelike motion. Bend first from the lumbar vertebrae, then from the thoracic vertebrae, and finally from the cervical vertebrae. At this point your spine is released all the way toward the floor.

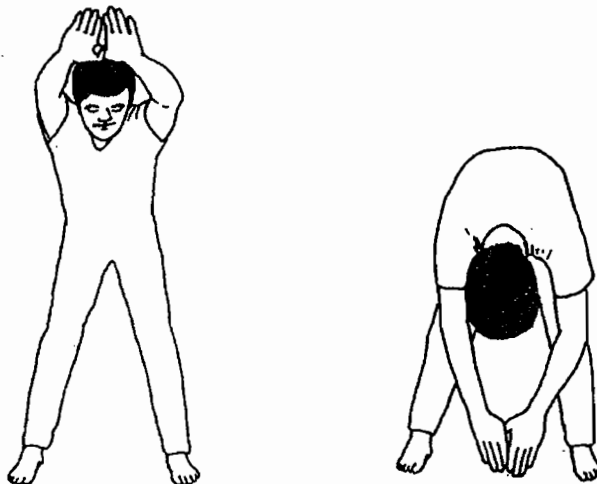


Fig. 4.4 Outer Front Extension movements down

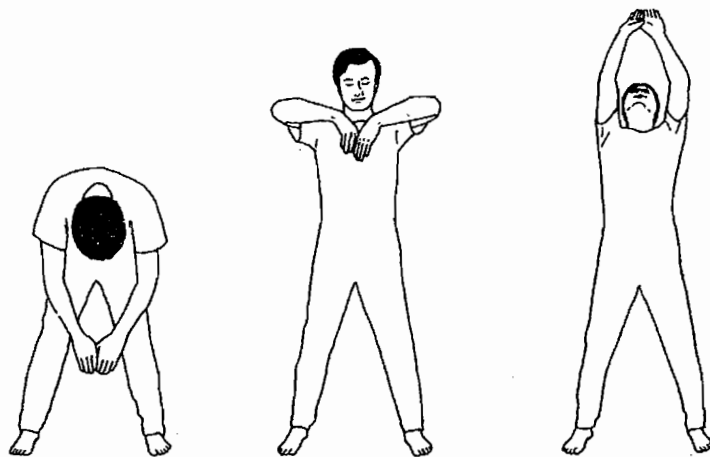


Fig. 4.5 Outer Front Extension movements up

4. Slowly straighten back up, again feeling each joint of the spine, from the sacrum and lumbar area through the thorax and the neck and base of the skull. Keep the arms hanging heavily and let the head be the last part of the body to come to vertical. Now you are back in the stretching position.
5. Repeat this movement three to five times. Finish with the arms overhead, as at the end of step 2.

### *Inner Front Extension*

1. Now do the same movements in reverse. Point the fingertips down toward the floor and slowly lower the arms, keeping the hands close to the torso. When the arms are completely lowered, begin to bend forward; release the head, the cervical vertebrae, the thoracic vertebrae, and the lumbar vertebrae until you are bent all the way forward, as at the end of step 3 of the Outer Front Extension. Feel each joint opening.

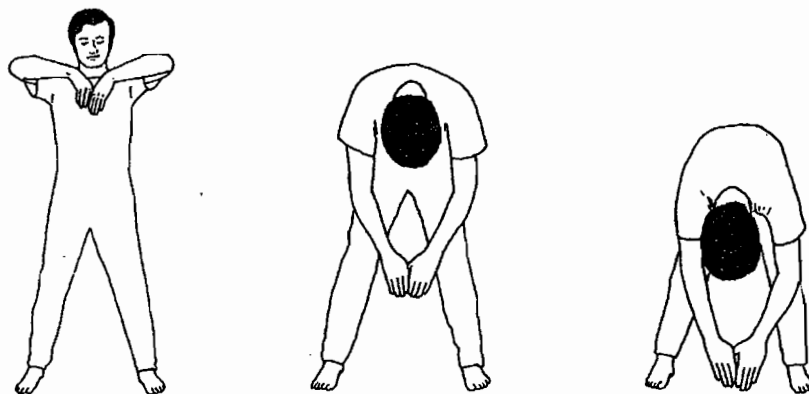


Fig. 4.6 Inner Front Extension movements down

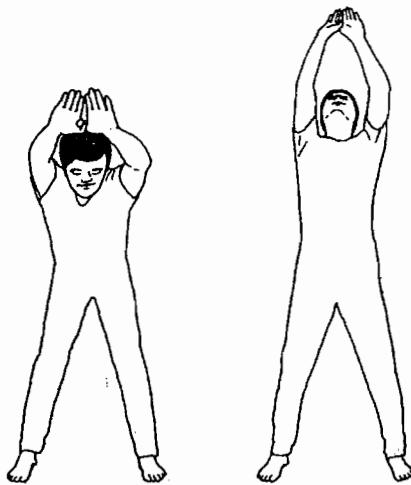


Fig. 4.7 Inner Front Extension movements up

2. Keeping the head between the arms, begin to straighten up. Feel each joint of the spine, from the sacrum and lumbar area through the thorax and the neck and base of the skull. This time let the arms extend out in front as you slowly stand erect. When you come to vertical, the arms will be straight against the head.
3. Gently stretch upward in this position, extending the spine slightly back. Say "Ah-h-h-h-h," as you would when you stretch first thing in the morning.
4. Repeat three to five times.

### Left Sidebending

1. Begin standing erect, feet shoulder-width apart. With your head between your arms in the overhead position, lean to the left. You should feel a gentle stretch on the left side of the waist.

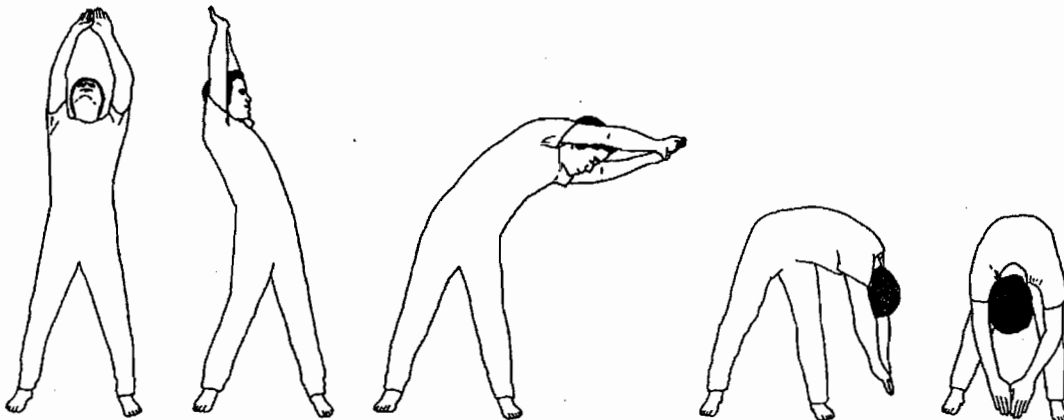


Fig. 4.8 Sidebending movements to the left

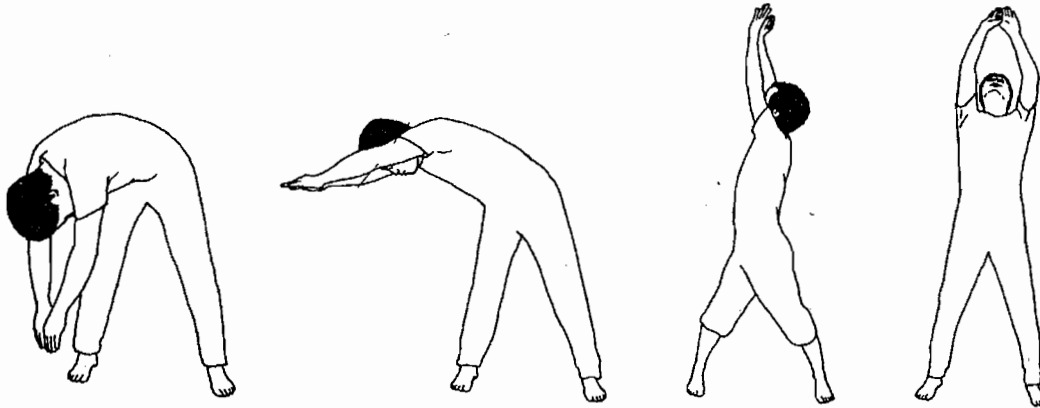


Fig. 4.9 Sidebending movements to the right

2. Continue stretching to the side until you've reached your limit, then gently rotate toward center as you stretch all the way down to the floor.
3. From center, circle back up on the right side until you are again standing straight with the arms overhead.
4. Repeat three to five times, bending left to center and returning on the right.

### *Right Sidebending and Conclusion*

1. Repeat the same movements as in the Left Sidebending, but this time begin bending to the right side and return on the left side.
2. Repeat three to five times.
3. To finish, unhook the thumbs and let the arms slowly float back down to the sides.



Fig. 4.10 Completion

## Tendon-Twisting Exercises

In these exercises the tendons of the wrists, elbows, and shoulders are stretched and twisted to enhance both flexibility and power. The movements should feel as though you are turning a screw into a wall.

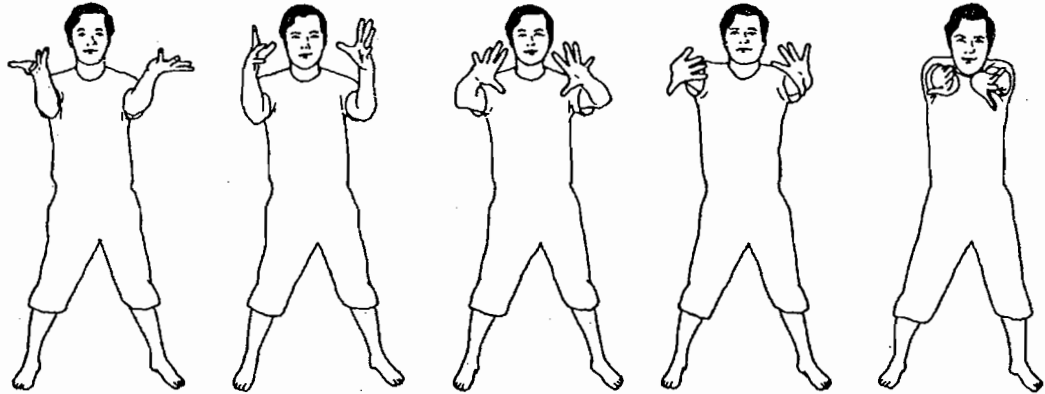


Fig. 4.11 Small Tendon Twist

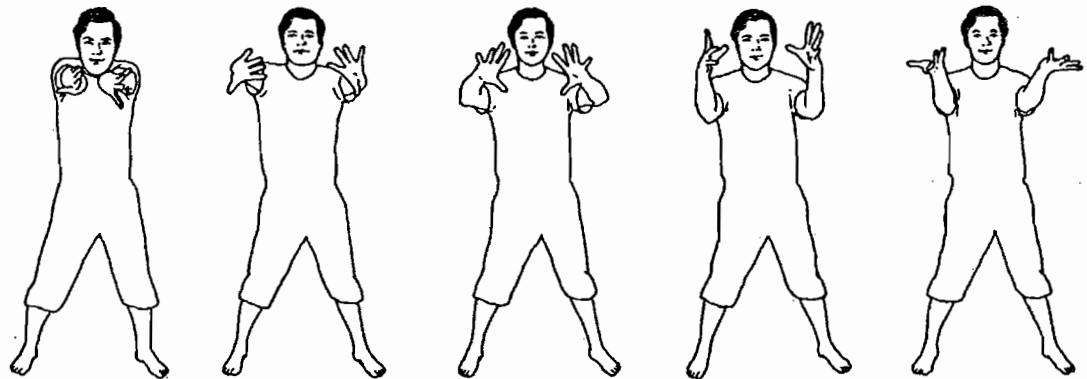


Fig. 4.12 Small Tendon Twist in reverse

### Small Tendon Twist

1. Begin standing erect, feet shoulder-width apart. Reach forward with both arms, palms up. Using a circular screwing motion, twist both thumbs so they face downward. Then reverse directions and circle the hands forward, returning to the starting position. While doing this, the wrists and elbows should be fully torqued to the point where, if you listen carefully, you can actually hear the stretching of the tendons that are being affected. The shoulders should be relaxed and rounded.
2. Repeat three to nine times.
3. Now repeat this movement with both arms above the head, with arms at the sides, and with both arms in front of the body but down at the groin.
4. Repeat three to nine times in each position.
5. Now repeat in all positions, but reverse the direction of the tendon twist.

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BEHIND THE BACK, ARMS  
DOWN

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## Large Tendon Twist

1. This exercise comprises the same movements as Small Tendon Twist but it is performed in large circles. This movement should be practiced only in the front of the body.
2. Do three to nine rounds of Large Tendon Twist.
3. Repeat the movements, reversing the direction of the tendon twist and joint opening. Practice three to nine rounds in this direction.

4. GENTLY "WINDMILL" ARMS IN CIRCLES TO SIDE.

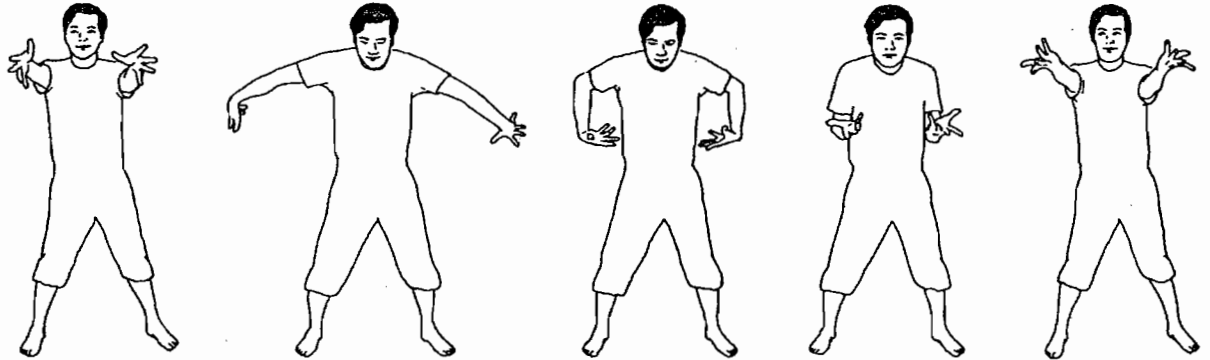


Fig. 4.13 Large Tendon Twist

## Head Rotations and Neck-Joint Opening

1. Stand erect, your hands on your hips. Let the head relax forward. Feel the weight of the head providing a gentle stretch to the back of the neck. Allow the weight of the head to provide all the loosening and stretching force; it helps you relax and release and avoids the risk of injury from overstraining.
2. Gently roll the head to the right and feel the stretch on the left side of the neck.
3. Feeling the weight of the head, gently roll the head to the back. Feel the stretch on the front of the neck.
4. Gently roll the head to the left, feeling the stretch on the right side of the neck.

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Fig. 4.14 Head Rotations

5. Repeat steps 1 through 4 two more times, and then repeat the sequence three times in the opposite direction.



## Shoulder Rotations and Joint Opening

This exercise increases your scapular power. Many people, especially those with a strong back, develop knots of tension in the shoulders. In this exercise the scapulae are loosened and rounded to develop the kind of scapular power used by tigers and other big cats.

1. Begin by standing with the feet parallel and slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Relax the entire body, paying special attention to relaxing the shoulders, scapulae, and back. Keep the palms loosely on the front of the thighs throughout this exercise.
2. Lift the shoulders straight up.
3. Extend the shoulders forward.
4. Lower the shoulders downward.
5. Draw the shoulders back.

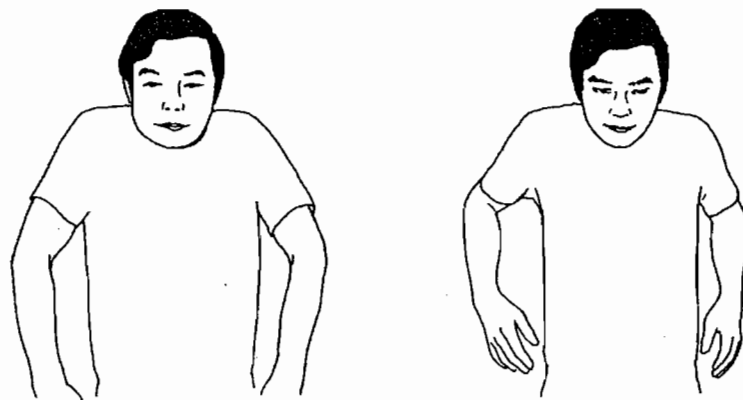


Fig. 4.15 Shoulder Rotations

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6. Repeat steps 2 through 5 eight more times.
7. Now reverse direction: raise the shoulders, draw them back, lower them, and bring them forward.
8. Repeat nine times.

## Hip Rotations

1. Stand with the feet parallel and slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Place the hands on the waist. As you perform Hip Rotations, keep the head positioned over the feet—don't jut the jaw and head forward or let the head fall behind the centerline of the body. Move slowly and easily, breathing deeply and continuously.
2. Bring the hips forward.
3. Move the hips in a big circle toward the right.

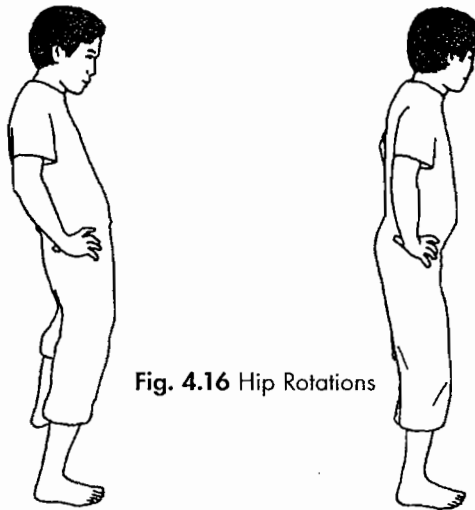


Fig. 4.16 Hip Rotations

4. Now move the hips in a circle toward the back.
5. Circle the hips toward the left.
6. Repeat steps 2 through 5 eight more times.
7. Reverse direction and repeat steps 2 through 5 nine times.

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## Knee Rotations

1. Stand erect with the feet together. Bend the knees and place the palms lightly on the kneecaps.



Fig. 4.17 Knee Rotations

2. Slowly and gently rotate the knees to the left.
3. Rotate the knees to the back. The muscles behind the knees will lengthen.
4. Rotate the knees to the right.
5. Repeat steps 2 through 4 eight more times.
6. Now reverse direction and repeat nine times.

## Ankle/Knee/Hip Rotations and Joint Opening

Keeping the joints open is an important part of allowing the energy to be properly stored and available to flow into the bones. This exercise helps open the joints and flex the tendons so you do not overstress them during Tai Chi practice.

1. Stand erect with your hands on your hips, feet together. Raise the right leg and begin to rotate the right ankle clockwise nine to thirty-six times.
2. Now rotate the ankle counterclockwise the same number of times.
3. Keeping the leg raised, rotate the foreleg from the knee in a clockwise circular motion nine to thirty-six times.
4. Now rotate the foreleg the same number of times counterclockwise.
5. Finally, rotate the entire leg from the hip joint in a clockwise circular motion nine to thirty-six times.
6. Rotate the leg the same number of times counterclockwise.
7. Repeat the sequence with the left leg raised.

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Fig. 4.18 Ankle Rotations



## Tan Tien Hitting

Since the lower tan tien is the major storage center for the chi of the body, this area should be activated prior to Tai Chi practice.

1. Stand with the feet parallel and slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Totally relax the arms and gracefully swing them in free fall from left to right. As you swing to the left, the right hand comes in front of the body, with the palm hitting the navel area at the exact same time that the back of the left hand hits the Door of Life, opposite the navel.
2. As you swing to the right the left hand comes in front of the body, with the palm hitting the navel area at the exact same time as the back of the right hand hits the Door of Life.
3. Repeat thirty-six times to each side.

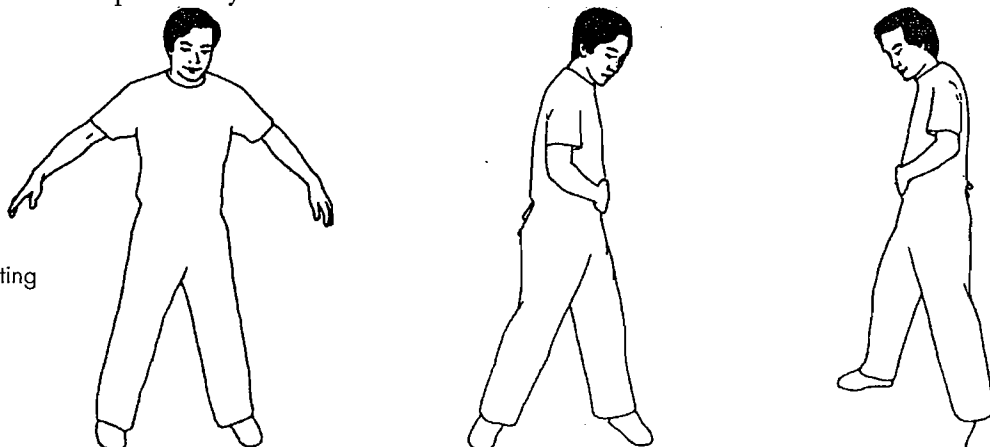


Fig. 4.19 Tan Tien Hitting

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## Bouncing and Shaking the Joints

Bouncing the body can be likened to a ride on the subway. For those of you who commute this way, this exercise can be practiced to and from work as well.

1. Stand with the feet parallel and slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Relax the body and concentrate on opening the joints.
2. Now bounce without any tension. Let the vibration in the heels work its way up through the entire skeletal system, from legs to spine to neck to skull. Shoulders and arms vibrate as the arms hang loosely out to the side or down by the sides of the body. To enhance the vibration you can hum a vowel, which will make the voice tremble as well.
3. Rest and feel chi entering the joints.

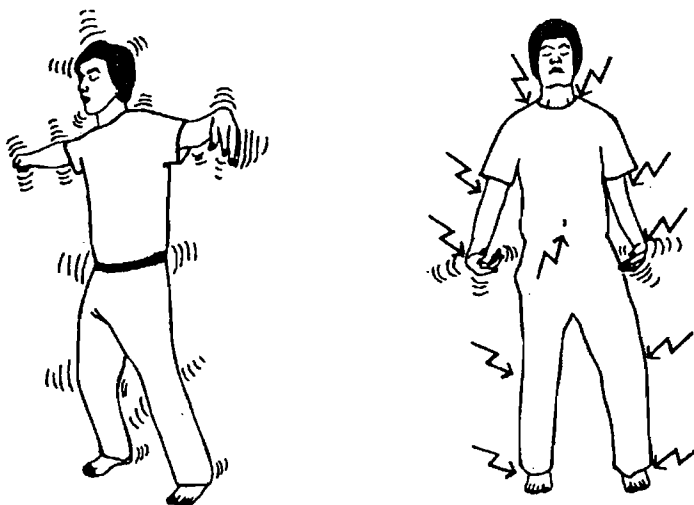


Fig. 4.20 Bouncing