

Proper posture the tai chi way

If you're like most people, your posture could use some improvement. But how do you do that? The classic advice is to stand straight, with your head up, shoulders back, and belly in. While these are reasonable adjustments, tai chi takes a different approach that may be more effective. It aims to align the body in ways that afford safe, unstrained, and graceful postures—not the military-like, one-size-fits all, rigid stances many think of as good posture.

Instead, in tai chi, good posture centers around the principle of verticality. That means the head is centered over the torso, the torso rests over the hips, and the hips are centered over the legs and feet, your base of support. Here's how to do it.



1. **The spine is literally the backbone of verticality, so let's start there.** Tai chi classics say, "The spine should be like a necklace of pearls hanging from heaven." Your goal should be to elongate the spine while still allowing for its natural curves. This can reduce wear and tear on the discs between your vertebrae. In this position, your head will also sit squarely on top of your spine instead of jutting forward—a common profile that you will see if you take the time to observe others. Your head weighs about 10 to 12 pounds, but just a slight tilt forward more than doubles the amount of strain on your neck muscles. Get into typical texting position, and your muscles must work five times as hard. No wonder your neck and upper back are tight and achy. Proper alignment helps prevent that.
2. **The next area to focus on comprises the waist and pelvic region,** which connect the upper body and lower body. In tai chi classics, this area is called the "commander." It's the central, coordinating hub where all movements originate. Muscle imbalances in this area have been associated with pain in the back, knee, and even neck, along with affecting your gait and balance. Maintaining tone and flexibility in the muscles and other soft tissues of the hip and pelvic area facilitates good posture and movement patterns and reduces pain.
3. **At the foundation of good posture are your feet,** but you rarely hear about them in traditional posture advice. If alignment is off at your feet, though, the imbalance travels up the body, possibly causing painful problems along the way. Western thinking usually attempts to correct these misalignments with products like shoe inserts, but tai chi works to naturally correct imbalances and improve range of motion. While specifics vary with different tai chi movements, in general you should keep your weight centered over the balls of your feet and all of your toes, and point your feet in the direction of your kneecaps. The result is a healthier posture that works for you without forcing your body into uncomfortable positions.

So, the next time you want to improve your posture, skip the stiff stance and focus on your spine, pelvic region, and feet.

To learn more about tai chi, its health benefits and how to learn its movements, check out [Introduction to Tai Chi](#) from Harvard Medical School.

Good advice from Dr. Harold

I was asked, "What is the difference between vitamin D2 and D3?"

Vitamin D3 is produced in your skin from cholesterol (7-dehydrocholesterol) triggered due to exposure to the UVB radiation from the sun. But unfortunately, Sri Lankans even in Sri Lanka may not get sufficient vitamin D3, being a tropical country with full day sunshine, because they are indoors at home and at workplace, travel in air-conditioned vehicles, and always attempts to avoid t...

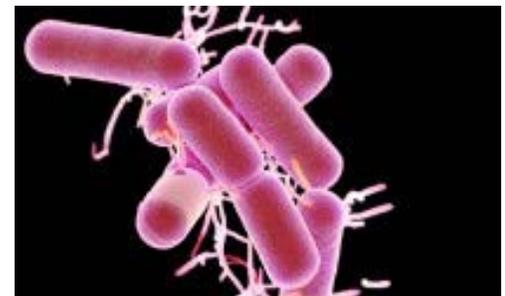
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ABC Health & Wellbeing

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