

Form 1: Preparation

This beginning form sets the tone for the whole 24 Forms. To begin, stand with your feet in a V-shape with heels touching. Feel your bubbling wells fill with weight.



Place all your weight on your right leg, bending your right knee just enough to support your weight. When your left leg is weightless ("empty" of weight), step to your left until your left foot is about shoulder-width apart from your right foot. When stepping, keep your shoulders level.

Place your stepping foot onto the ground as effortlessly as you can, as the pilot of a jumbo jet would "settle" a plane's landing gear on a runway. Seek a "smooth landing." Feel your weight settle into your feet's bubbling wells. Feel your feet adhere to the ground on the nine points.

This starting stance is your first opportunity in 24 Forms to stand properly. Get off to a good start.

Check your posture before you begin

- Are your waist, hips, knees, and ankles relaxed? If not, your weight will not be able to fall properly onto your feet.
- Are your shoulders stiff? It is very important for them to be relaxed.
- Is your sacrum correctly positioned? (The sacrum is a bony mass shaped like an arrowhead that's at the base of your spine.) To experience the correct position, while standing gently tuck in your butt. When your sacrum is positioned properly, your feet will feel more firmly connected to the ground.
- Are you resisting your weight's sinking toward the ground? Just let it sink. Imagine that it's filling your bubbling wells. In particular, don't "bottle" any of your sinking weight at either your hips or knees. Allow it to flow downward naturally, unobstructed. It's particularly important to let your hips relax.
- Are both feet pointing forward? Feel the bottoms of your feet contacting the ground. Envision the earth's energy rising upward from your feet, up your legs and spine, and into your scapulae (shoulder blades).
- Is the top of your head in the position it would assume if it were balancing a book on it? Your chin should be slightly tucked in, and

your neck should be relaxed. There should not be any stiffness in your neck.

More information about the head's position

Your head should feel as if it is suspended from a string. This differs from imagining that a string is pulling your head upward, which some tai chi texts suggest. Another way to envision this is by imagining that the top of your head is gently trying to touch the ceiling or — if you're outside — the sky.

When doing this form, imagine that energy rising from the bottoms of your feet and centered on each foot's bubbling well is raising you, straightening your spine, and pushing your head into the proper position.

Doing the first form

Inhale.

Slightly release your feet's contact with the ground. Allow the energy that arises from your feet to begin raising your arms, which should be void of tension. Feel as if strings attached to your wrists are pulling them



outward and upward in an arc until your wrists reach shoulder-height.

As your wrists rise, allow your elbows to sink. Your wrists should feel light, and your elbows should feel heavy.

As your wrists rise, keep your shoulders relaxed: Do not raise them as your wrists rise.

As your wrists rise, let your fingers "come alive."

When fully raised, your arms should have a slight bend in them, and your elbows should be lower than your wrists.

Exhale.

Allow gravity to lower your elbows into your chest. Lower your wrists to waist height as if they were sinking in water while your fingers float on the water's surface. Let your wrists follow your elbows natural descent.

Handling knee problems

Sometimes tai chi practitioners experience knee pain when doing tai chi. Often, it's because of postural misalignment.

If when doing a form you have pain on the sides of the knees, check whether your foot, ankle, knee, and thigh are aligned when you place weight on a leg. Pain on one side of the knee could indicate that your weighted leg is out of alignment toward the side of the pain.

If your pain is in or under your knee, check whether the knee of your weighted leg is extending beyond that leg's toes, which it shouldn't. In addition, check that your tailbone is not sticking out

past your back foot's heel. If it is, gently tuck your tailbone in.

Also, check your spine. Make sure that it's properly aligned.

Finally, check to ensure that when your whole foot is on the ground, your weight is equally distributed on the nine points.

Every form consists of multiple postures. In each form, there's at least one posture in which correct alignment is especially important.

Key posture in Form 1

In every form there are instances when you are standing with all your weight on one leg. The unweighted leg is referred to as being *empty*. In Form 1, the "empty leg" occurs when you're extending your left leg outward. To do that you first must shift your weight to your right leg.

During the time when one leg (in this case the left leg) is empty, it's especially important that you adhere to tai chi's principles of postural alignment. If you do, you will remain balanced as one leg empties and moves.

These principles will not only help you remain balanced when doing tai chi, they will also help you to maintain balance when you're not doing tai chi. That in itself is a powerful reason for doing tai chi.



Form 1 review

Feet and knees

- Position your feet shoulder-width apart, pointing forward.
- Gently lower your knees.

Palms, arms, and shoulders

- Raise your palms to shoulder height.
- Keep your elbows loose.
- Sink your shoulders.
- Allow your fingers to bend naturally.



Visual of Form 1

The movements below continue from the starting position shown in the above photo.

