

T'AI CHI CHIH
PARKINSONS TIPS FROM STEPHEN THOMPSON*

Stephen teaches once weekly for about 45 minutes per class.

Emphasizes that it's ok to sit down.

Takes a couple of breaks using time to discuss principles, benefits, etc.

Students like props and partner practice.

Emphasize that it's best to imagine coming up on balls of the feet to begin. It will happen in its own timing.

Do 12 to 15 repetitions per side each movement. It may take your Parkinson's students longer to get into the flow than doing only 9.

Move slow.

1. T'ai Chi Chih helps with balance for people with Parkinson's Disease.

2. Plates as props – props create FUN! In partner practice, use a white paper plate with 1 partner doing Around The Platter and the other doing Pulling in the Energy, both moving their hands in sync

Pulling Energy person lets the plate rest on their palms.

Don't look at plate! See it peripherally.

Person doing Around the Platter person keeps hands over the plate.

When beginning, Platter person waits a half turn for plate to come their way.

Polarity of the two partners will give an energy transfer and synchronize their movements.

3. If doing movements is not as easy or complete (Depends on degree of Parkinson's) tell them to "Do your Best in Your Mind" Often body will eventually follow. Movements can be challenging in more severe cases, if so, do seated. Some won't begin standing... Some won't will be challenged to come up on balls of feet or heels. Eventually it will happen (in its own timing, so be patient please). Hold off on Working the Pulley until students are more advanced. Those who have a prescription for Sinemet and have difficulty (Sinemet freezes them up) find Seijaku can be helpful.

Seijaku: Encourage students not to anticipate the hard and soft.

Don't try to push things over like a refrigerator.

Notice how back leg goes stiff as you push a fridge

Push while the feet are flat. Let them be flat a long time. Then release.

Pattern: Incorporate 6 regular movements with 3 strong, 3 soft, 3 strong, 3 soft and long rest.

4. Pick Movements Apart for Parkinson's Students. Teach weight shifts and hand movements separately. Try not to overload your students by introducing too much information about any one movement – concentrate on one aspect of the body and what it's doing at at time. Hands are helpful for balance (as in Rest Position) while learning the forward and back weight shifts.

Say, "Notice how well grounded you are when both feet are flat on ground ... They stay flat a long, long time."

At first, emphasize center part of weight shifts. Both feet flat more than the ends of the weight shifts. It's easy for them to feel grounded all the way through the glide forward and backward through the middle of each weight shift. Then teach transition points when weight is fully shifted to center of foot.

Another day say, "Notice how the back knee goes straight" (without talking about front knee).

Another day say, "Notice how back heel comes up by itself as the T'an Tien pushes through to the center of the front foot.

Give a lot of praise!

Teach arms separately while sitting down then teach standing.

5. Seijaku strength is very helpful for times when the body is rebelling. Not able to be soft all of the time. Reinforces that what is hard resisting will yield/eventually and release to soft and easy.

OFFER PRAISE LAVISHLY!!! It helps students realize how far they've progressed!

*Stephen has 2 Physical Therapists as references that can speak to TCC's effectiveness for Parkinson's patients. Amanda Allen (662) 401-6476 & Ginger Gore (662) 983-8063.

His students out-perform others who do not do TCC.

Consider teaching Carry the Ball, Seijaku style without the resistance principle.

Don't worry about teaching Taffies at beginning. They are very challenging for Parkinson's students. Recommend staying with Pulling Taffy and then Anchor Taffy (much later).

Stephen's students love Passing Clouds and some love Rocking Motion.

(A warm, heartfelt "Thank You!" to Teacher Judy Chancy for transcribing these notes from our conversation after Conference.)