

# The Dancing Bear Exercise

By Derek Croley



One of the best basic exercises in the art of Tai Chi is called the Dancing Bear. In this exercise you are working on several things all at once. Physically you are working on rotating around your centerline, coordinating your feet, knees, hips, lower back (Mingmen), shoulders, arms and head. This means that you are getting everything in your body working together. When your body is working all as one you greatly decrease the physical wear and tear on any particular part. Mentally you are working on directing a centralized motion of your entire body- requiring a mental focus, while at the same time requiring relaxation to get right. All in all, this is a great exercise for getting your body working as one piece under the guidance of your mind- helping you get focused and relaxed all at the same time!

You may wish to practice this yourself when you need to de-stress a bit, or are working really hard on a project and need to take a second to get your head back on straight. This is also great for athletes to work on body mechanics. I taught this at a running seminar and it was soon the talk of the entire camp! They couldn't believe how much something so simple could be of such great benefit for their running mechanics. Or if you are a professional counselor, as many of our clients are, this is great to teach an aging population (it is a no impact, easy yet effective workout), a youth group (body mechanics and focus), or anybody who has issues with body-mind connection in any way.

How it works is as follows. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent. Lift the back of your head, and tuck the base of your spine while letting the lower back relax and fill outward. To begin with, use your knees as a trigger. Bend one knee slightly more than the other. You'll find that this makes the hip over the more bent knee go down and forward, while the other knee and hip go up and back. Do this motion back and forth, turning your body from side to side around your centerline (an imaginary line that runs down the center of your body). Never let your centerline bend, rather let everything turn around it. Let your arms flop and turn with the motion of your body. You can use where your arms hit as a measure of your balance of flexibility. If one arm won't go as far as the other you know that your hip flexibility isn't as good in that direction.

Remember that your foot, knee, hip, and shoulder should be in a straight line at the

farthest point in your turn. It is common to make the error of letting your knee bow in and your hip bow out- don't do that. Keep everything in a straight line.

As you get better your trigger for the movement will move from your knees up to your lower back- when you have your lower back as the source of the movement of your legs as well as your arms you are getting somewhere with this.

Do this every morning for a few minutes and you will feel refreshed, focused, and energized in a way that will amaze you. For more information about this as well as some of our other exercises check out our upcoming seminar entitled "Tai Chi for Mental Health" that will be on February 9th, 2008 in Asheville, NC. This is geared towards health professional and professional counselors- but will be beneficial for absolutely anybody who wishes to attend. For more information go to [www.TheWhiteOakInstitute.com](http://www.TheWhiteOakInstitute.com).