Baduanjin (Eight Brocades)

the full sequence, step by step

Baduanjin, the Eight Brocades, is a standing qigong set of eight slow movements done in a fixed order. One round takes about 10 to 15 minutes. All eight are written out below.

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The person in these photos does not exist. The images were made with AI. Why?

Before you start. Move slowly and only as far as feels comfortable. Stop if you feel pain, dizziness or shortness of breath. If you have a medical condition, have had surgery, are pregnant or are unsure, ask your doctor first. This page does not replace medical advice or instruction from a qualified teacher.

What are the eight Baduanjin movements, in order?

#	What the body does	Common name	Repeats
1	Press both palms overhead	Two Hands Hold Up the Heavens	6
2	Draw a bow each side	Drawing the Bow	3 per side
3	One arm up, one arm down	Separating Heaven and Earth	3 per side
4	Look back over the shoulder	Wise Owl Gazes Backward	3 per side
5	Lean and circle the torso	Swaying Head and Tail	3 per side
6	Slide hands to the feet	Two Hands Hold the Feet	6
7	Punch forward, eyes wide	Clench Fists and Glare	3 per side
8	Rise on toes, lower heels	Bouncing on the Toes	7

This is the order of China's standardized Health Qigong form from 2003. Health Qigong is the name for the qigong forms that a government-founded Chinese association compiles and publishes in standardized versions. Repeats follow a Chinese city health bureau's guide. Some versions swap 6 and 7 or repeat each movement 6 to 8 times. Traditional names carry old ideas about the organs, so we name what the body does.

How do you do Baduanjin step by step?

Inhale as you rise or open, exhale as you sink or close. The movements follow published excerpts of the May 2026 standard, which builds on the 2003 form. Horse stance means feet wider than the shoulders, toes forward, knees bent only as far as feels comfortable. Movements 5 and 6 take your head low, so read the easier versions further down first.

Ready position. Stand with feet together. Shift right and step the left foot out to shoulder width. Bend your knees and round your arms in front of the navel, palms in, as if holding a ball.



1 Press both palms overhead

Interlace fingers at the belly, palms up.

Inhale: straighten legs and press palms overhead, glancing up, then look ahead again.

Exhale: bend knees, part hands and float them down to the belly.

6 times



2 Draw a bow each side

Shift right, step the left foot wide and cross wrists at the chest.

Inhale: in horse stance, push the left hand out, index finger up, pull the right hand to the shoulder and look left.

Exhale: shift right, step the left foot back in, bring hands to the belly, then switch.

3 times per side



3 One arm up, one arm down

Feet shoulder-width apart, hands at the belly.

Inhale: straighten legs, lift the left palm overhead and press the right beside the hip.

Exhale: bend knees, return hands to the belly, then switch.

3 times per side



4 Look back over the shoulder

Inhale: straighten legs and rotate straight arms outward, about 45 degrees from the body. Turn only the head, slowly and only as far as is comfortable, to look back over the left shoulder.

Exhale: face front, bend knees, press palms beside the hips, then look right.

3 times per side



5 Lean and circle the torso

Shift left, step the right foot wide, raise palms overhead, then sink into horse stance, hands on thighs.

Exhale: lean toward the right foot, only as far as is comfortable.

Inhale: sweep the torso across to the left and circle up to center, then repeat starting left.

3 times per side



6 Slide hands to the feet

Bring the right foot in to shoulder width, straighten legs, raise arms, bring palms to the chest and slip hands under the armpits to the back.

Exhale: slide palms down the back and legs, folding forward only as far as is comfortable.

Inhale: reach forward and let the arms lift you slowly upright.

6 times



7 Punch forward, eyes wide

Shift right, step the left foot wide into horse stance, fists at the waist.

Exhale: slowly punch the left fist forward at shoulder height, eyes on it.

Inhale: open and circle the hand, close the fist, pull it to the waist, then punch right.

3 times per side



8 Rise on toes, lower heels

Stand with feet together or, for more support, hip-width apart, arms at the sides.

Inhale: lift heels and stay up briefly, without holding your breath.

Exhale: lower them slowly and set them down softly.

7 times

Closing. Float arms out about 45 degrees, rest hands on the lower belly, one over the other, then let arms drop.

Where does Baduanjin come from?

The name means "eight pieces of brocade," a fine cloth, and Chinese texts mention the set from the Song dynasty (960 to 1279). China's General Administration of Sport published the standardized form in 2003. The Chinese Health Qigong Association and the China Association of Chinese Medicine issued a joint standard in May 2026, based on that form. NCCIH, the US federal research center, lists Baduanjin among qigong forms.

How can you adapt it?

Options without a source are our adaptations and sit outside the standard form.

- **Less range:** Stand taller in horse stance, as a Chinese health qigong researcher advises beginners. In movement 5, lean only a little and keep your head above hip height. If that is still hard, do 2 rounds per side. In movement 6, stop at the knees.
- **Head and balance:** In movement 1, look straight ahead if looking up makes you dizzy. In movement 8, keep one hand on a chair back.
- **Bones:** In people with osteoporosis, bending forward and twisting at the waist can raise the risk of broken bones in the spine, Mayo Clinic says. Skip 5 and 6 and ask your doctor first.
- **Seated:** On a firm chair, do the arm and head parts of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7, and lift heels for 8. Skip 5 and 6. We made this selection, and it has no traditional lineage. A separate traditional seated set also exists.
- **Shorter:** Practice a few movements on their own. See qigong for seniors.

How do you start in the first weeks?

This plan is our suggestion, based on the 2026 standard's advice: one round a day at first, at least 3 practice days a week.

- **Week 1:** Learn one or two movements a day, shape first.
- **Weeks 2 and 3:** Do one full round on at least 3 days a week and add the breath.
- **Week 4 on:** Add a second round if comfortable.

New to qigong? Start with qigong for beginners.

Is there a free Baduanjin video?

Yes: EASY to FOLLOW Health Qigong Ba Duan Jin from Tai Chi United, about 15 minutes. It follows the Chinese Health Qigong Association's updated routine, so small details may differ. See also the YouTube channel comparison.

What is Baduanjin good for?

A 2026 overview of 261 reviews shows where research on Baduanjin has concentrated: heart and circulation, muscle and joint pain, memory and nerve conditions, metabolism, mood and sleep, cancer and recovery after surgery, and lung disease, with evidence of low or very low certainty. Many people practice Baduanjin as a slow daily routine. See what studies report on qigong and whether qigong is safe.

What next?

- **Follow along:** EASY to FOLLOW Health Qigong Ba Duan Jin from Tai Chi United.
- **Next set:** the 18 Shibashi movements, a longer flowing set.

- **What studies report:** qigong benefits.