

Benefits of Practising Tai Chi and Chi Kung

Anyone can benefit from Tai Chi -- like most low-impact exercises, it can be an important part of a healthy lifestyle. While western medicine doesn't consider Tai Chi to be able to cure illnesses, health care professionals often suggest it as a complementary therapy for many conditions.

Unlike some other types of exercise, Tai Chi is accessible to people of any age and condition -- children, senior citizens, and even those with walkers. Some modified forms of Tai Chi can be practised by those with limited mobility. In fact, Tai Chi is particularly beneficial to the elderly and those with impaired motor skills. Since Tai Chi emphasizes correct posture and balance, the exercise may be a safer alternative for people with frail bones. Moreover, you can practice at home and you don't need special clothes nor equipment.

You can find much useful information on Tai Chi, with respect to various medical conditions, by using a search engine such as Google or Yahoo. When searching, remember to use quotes around your phrase - and various spellings; for example:

"cancer with tai chi" "cancer with taiji" "taiji and cancer"

"tai chi and cancer" "cancer with chi kung" "cancer with qigong"

"chi kung and cancer" "qigong and cancer"

More research needs to be done to determine the specific benefits, but some studies suggest that Tai Chi can help to relieve or prevent certain conditions. Among the areas where Tai Chi is considered useful are the following:

- *ADHD*. During and after five weeks of tai chi lessons, adolescents with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) showed less anxiety, daydreaming, inappropriate emotions and hyperactivity, according to a study by the Touch Research Institute (TRI).
- *Alzheimers*. (see Dementia)
- *Aging*. Tai Chi can improve some of the effects of aging. Studies have found that practicing Tai Chi can reduce the risk of falls in the elderly; it helps to improve balance and strength. Accordingly, it can also improve confidence. Tai Chi also has been shown to lower blood pressure and improve grip strength in older people. Many of its other benefits -- such as improved cardiopulmonary function, lowered blood pressure and stress reduction-- are of vital importance to the elderly.
- *Anxiety*. Tai Chi has an additional benefit of reducing anxiety.
- *Arthritis, rheumatism and fibromyalgia*. Tai Chi helps strengthen the muscles around an arthritic joint; this improves flexibility and range of motion. It may also reduce some joint pain. The low impact and flowing movement can actually counteract the effects of other activities that push joints together. The Arthritis Foundation promotes Tai Chi as a means of delaying the progression of this disease.

- *Asthma.* Regular practice strengthens and improves the body's immune system, and can, over time increase DHEA levels in the body, greatly reducing both asthma and allergy symptoms. The Asthma Foundation promotes Tai Chi as a means of delaying the progression of this disease.
- *Back pain.* Studies show that Tai Chi helps improve flexibility; this can help ease back pain (at least one study has indicated a reduction in lower-back pain). The practice also is used to help rehabilitate muscle and bone injuries.
- *Balance.* Tai Chi has been proven to be the most effective balance and coordination conditioner in the world. We all know that the elderly are susceptible to falls, which can cause broken bones and long periods of hospitalisation. A good sense of balance can minimise the risk of falling and extend one's period of independence.
- *Blood Pressure.* Tai Chi can lower blood pressure and result in favourable lipid profile changes. For more details visit <http://www.tranquillizer.co.uk/articles/High-Blood-Pressure-and-Tai-Chi-Therapy.html>
- *Cancers.* Medical research has shown that some cancers can be treated with Tai Chi and Chi Kung. Use the net to find more detail.
- *Cardiorespiratory health.* At least one study suggests that Tai Chi can slow the decline in respiratory function (a particular problem among the elderly). And the regular exercise afforded by the practice -- comparable to a moderate aerobic workout -- provides cardiorespiratory conditioning.
- *Cholesterol*
- *Circulation problems.* Tai Chi stimulates circulation, improving blood flow to the extremities and its return to the heart.
- *Concentration.* seniors who are physically fit do better on cognitive tests than those who aren't.
- *Coordination.* The slow movements of Tai Chi enable coordination between arms (and legs) to slowly develop.
- *Dementia.* Medical research shows that habitual exercisers suffer less brain tissue loss as they age than do less-active people.
- *Diabetes.* Tai Chi and Chi Kung can be of benefit in lowering the need for medication to control this condition. For more information visit <http://www.egreenway.com/taichichuan/diabetcc.htm>
- *Heart attack recovery.* Tai Chi is used in cardiac rehabilitation and at least one study indicates it helps speed recovery. One reason seems to be the fact that it can help to lower blood pressure and heart rate.
- *High blood pressure.* Studies indicate that Tai Chi lowers blood pressure, especially in sedentary older adults. Apparently, enhanced blood flow and relaxation through the slow, gentle movements and the meditative aspect of the practice contribute to the lower pressure. The practice may also help lower the resting heart rate.
- *Immune System.*
- *Insomnia.* While Tai Chi can be practiced to energize the body, it can also be practiced to relax it. Performed just prior to bedtime, Tai Chi can prepare the body for a deep, restful night's sleep.
- *Loss of balance.* Studies indicate that the practice improves balance and reinforces the gains made in more intensive strength and balance training.
- *Multiple sclerosis.* Early studies suggest that Tai Chi helps people with MS to increase physical activity/functioning. It may enhance muscle tone, flexibility,

coordination and general well being, and some chapters of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society offer Tai Chi classes. (MS appears 50 percent more frequently in women than in men.)

- *Osteoporosis*. Since Tai Chi is a weight-bearing exercise, it is ideal for women hoping to avoid osteoporosis. Research shows that women who perform weight bearing and resistance-type exercises can slow bone loss, and may, in some cases, help increase bone mass. And since Tai Chi is a low-impact exercise stressing posture and balance; it's probably a viable option if you already have the condition.
- Posture.
- Relaxation. In an article entitled, "Relax: Techniques to help you achieve tranquillity" Mayoclinic.com recommends Tai Chi for relaxation training
- *Stress*. Tai Chi appears to reduce the amount of stress hormones in the body.
- Tumours. See 'cancer'
- Weight management. Tai Chi can be of considerable benefit in reducing hunger and in burning off calories.

It's important to remember that Tai Chi isn't a cure for everything. If you have underlying health problems you need to continue seeing your regular health care professional. But Tai Chi does offer countless health benefits and no known negative side effects. It's appropriate for virtually any individual of any age. If you've been sedentary, or have health problems, always check with your health care professional before beginning a new exercise plan.

An article from Archives of Internal Medicine, as reported on NBC's local WCAU Health

http://wcau-tvhealth.ip2m.com/index.cfm?pt=itemDetail&Item_ID=112735&Site_Cat_ID=77)

explained that a Tai Chi research program at Tufts-New England Medical Centre in Boston revealed a great deal. The article authors wrote, "Overall, these studies reported that long-term Tai Chi practice had favourable effects on the promotion of balance control, flexibility and cardiovascular fitness and reduced the risk of falls in elderly . . . Cardiovascular and respiratory function improvements were noted in healthy people and those who had undergone coronary artery bypass surgery as well as people with heart failure, hypertension, acute myocardial infarction, arthritis and multiple sclerosis . . . Benefit was also found for balance, strength, and flexibility in older subjects; falls in frail elderly subjects; and pain, stress and anxiety in healthy subjects."

They detail how you can improve body responses to stress, such as: slowing your heart rate; reducing blood pressure; slowing your breathing rate; reducing the need for oxygen; increasing blood flow to the major muscles; lessening muscle tension. They go on to explain that practicing relaxation techniques may help you to experience: fewer symptoms of illness (such as headaches, nausea, diarrhoea and pain); fewer emotional responses such as anger, crying, anxiety, apprehension and frustration; more energy; improved concentration; greater ability to handle problems and more efficiency in daily activities. So, time and time again as we begin to examine one particular benefit of Tai Chi, such as lowering high blood pressure, we see a whole universe of potential opening up before us.