

This healing art states that we cannot separate body, mind and spirit. The Practitioner experiences levels of each as they explore this moving meditation. Ultimately connecting and respecting 'each' as 'all' - one body connecting our self to all around us in a continual journey of discovery and learning.

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## **Harvard Health Publishing**

### **The health benefits of tai chi**

**This gentle form of exercise can help maintain strength, flexibility, and balance, and could be the perfect activity for the rest of your life.**

**Tai chi is often described as "meditation in motion,"** but it might well be called "meditation in motion." There is growing evidence that this mind-body practice, which originated in China as a martial art, has value in treating or preventing many health problems. And you can get started even if you aren't in top shape or the best of health. *A Taoist monk, Mr. Moy, is the founder of a form we teach whose focus is Wellness & Longevity. He came to Canada on his quest for peace and to fulfill his lifelong goal to ease the suffering of others through this Taoist Tai Chi.*

In this low-impact, slow-motion exercise, you go without pausing through a series of motions named for animal actions — for example, "white crane spreads its wings" — or martial arts moves, such as "box both ears." As you move, you breathe deeply and naturally, focusing your attention — as in some kinds of meditation — on your bodily sensations. **Tai chi differs from other types of exercise in several respects. The movements are usually circular and never forced, the muscles are relaxed rather than tensed, the joints are not fully extended or bent, and connective tissues are not over-stretched. Tai chi can be easily adapted for anyone, from people confined to wheelchairs or recovering from surgery to those most fit wishing to expand their wellness.**

Tai chi movements help maintain strength, flexibility and balance. A growing body of carefully conducted research is building a compelling case for tai chi as an adjunct to standard medical treatment for the prevention and rehabilitation of many conditions commonly associated with age. An adjunct therapy is one that's used together with primary medical treatments, either to address a disease itself or its primary symptoms, or, more generally, to maintain and improve a patient's functioning and quality of life.

## **Belief systems**

You don't need to subscribe to or learn much about tai chi's roots in Chinese philosophy to enjoy its health benefits, but these concepts can help make sense of its approach:

**Qi** — pronounced 'chi' is an energy force that flows through the body; tai chi is said to unblock and encourage the proper flow of qi. *Chi is not only blood circulation as we know it in the west, but all our internal organs and tissues, then ultimately our spirit or inner soul. How we think and feel has a direct connection to everything inside us. Modern medicine now recognizes the impact of mental health and stress on the physical body.*

**Yin and yang** — opposing elements thought to make up the universe that need to be kept in harmony. Tai chi is said to promote this balance. *Yin are the 'internals' (what is inside us) and Yang the 'externals' (what is on the outside and you can see).*

**The Tao** – also known as 'The Way' is a foundational philosophy connected with the practise of tai chi. Lao Tzu, a Chinese philosopher, wrote the book *Tao Te Ching (I-ching)* one of China's three great teachings that encompass: Confucianism (wisdom, teachings of societal order); Buddhism (nirvana), and; Taoism ("The Way" by Lao Tzu) which is how all are accessed – "each" as "all". Western society has Governance models and multiple Spiritual traditions, but this missing link is an effective way to access body, mind and spirit daily through a walking meditation. All the while the body moves through time and space to calm the heart, ease the mind and forget our worries for a while.

## **Tai chi in motion**

A tai chi class might include these parts:

Warm-up. Easy motions, such as shoulder circles, turning the head from side to side, or rocking back and forth, help you to loosen your muscles and joints and focus on your breath and body.

Instruction and practice of tai chi forms. Short forms — forms are sets of movements — may include a dozen or fewer movements; long forms may include hundreds. Different styles require smaller or larger movements. A short form with smaller, slower movements is usually recommended at the beginning, especially if you're older or not in good condition.

*The long form and most published is the Yang style 108 movements, but Tai Chi Chuan's aim is the martial art of protection and battle. Mr. Moy modified this style to soften the extensions and make it accessible for all body types and ages. There are many levels of*

*Mr. Moys' Tai Chi and your tai chi is unique to you, your body and how much you practise. Longevity and wellness is the outcome (quality of life; independent living). Mr. Moys' Tai Chi meets his vision and mission to ease suffering as long as your practise some of it every day.*

**Qigong** (or chi kung). Translated as "breath work" or "energy work," this consists of a few minutes of gentle breathing sometimes combined with movement. The idea is to help relax the mind and mobilize the body's energy. Qigong may be practiced standing, sitting, or lying down.

*In Mr. Moy's Tai Chi form is an Internal journey that unfolds the more you practise daily. He felt Qigong is already an integral part of the movement and so it is not practised separately, but rather flows at the rate your own body needs throughout the movements. If you need to stop, you stop. If you stop – then watch as one learns as much 'watching' as 'doing' in this art.*

### **Getting started**

*We are all Beginners in this form of Tai Chi. Continually learning and deepening the moves, therefore we are all at different stages of growth. When you start you are a Newcomer and once completed this first Series you graduate into the many layers of a Continuing Participant. Be patient with yourself, you will benefit at all levels....they just get more enjoyable and have deeper impact. Since our wellness journeys are full of ups and downs, this art will help you to recover and get through any hurdles with more relaxation, less pain and quicker recovery. You will learn to listen to your body better and adapt your tai chi sustaining your attainable level of wellness forever. This is the longevity part 😊*

The benefits of tai chi are generally greatest if you begin before you develop a chronic illness or functional limitations. **Tai chi is very safe, and no fancy equipment is needed, so it's easy to get started.** Here's some advice for doing so:

Don't be intimidated by the language. Names like Yang, Wu, and Cheng are given to various branches of tai chi, in honor of people who devised the sets of movements called forms. Certain programs emphasize the martial arts aspect of tai chi rather than its potential for healing and stress reduction. In some forms, you learn long sequences of movements, while others involve shorter series and more focus on breathing and meditation. The name is less important than finding an approach that matches your interests and needs.

**Check with your doctor. If you have a limiting musculoskeletal problem or medical condition — or if you take medications that can make you dizzy or lightheaded — check**

**with your doctor before starting tai chi. Given its excellent safety record, chances are that you'll be encouraged to try it.**

Taking a class may be the best way to learn tai chi. Seeing a teacher in action, getting feedback, and experiencing the camaraderie of a group are all pluses. Most teachers will let you observe the class first to see if you feel comfortable with the approach and atmosphere. Instruction can be individualized. Ask about classes at your local church, senior center, or community health education center.

If you'd rather learn at home, you can buy or rent videos geared to your interests and fitness needs. Although there are some excellent tai chi books, it can be difficult to appreciate the flow of movements from still photos or illustrations. *We at have videos that take you through a 20 lesson journey to learn all 108 moves. Contact [susan.lowervens@gmail.com](mailto:susan.lowervens@gmail.com) for enquiries. There are other resources and classes available under Resources at the end of this article.*

Talk to the instructor. There's no standard training or licensing for tai chi instructors, so you'll need to rely on their background, recommendations from friends or clinicians and, of course, your own judgment. Look for an experienced teacher who will accommodate individual health concerns or levels of coordination and fitness.

**Dress comfortably. Choose loose-fitting clothes that don't restrict your range of motion.** You can practice barefoot or in lightweight, comfortable, and **flexible shoes**. Tai chi shoes are available, but ones you find in your closet will probably work fine. Initially, you'll need shoes that won't slip and can provide enough support to help you balance. Have soles thin enough to allow you to feel the ground. Running shoes, designed to propel you forward, are usually unsuitable. *Once you complete your Newcomer training you will “find your feet” and balance in such a way that you will no longer slip on any floor.*

Gauge your progress. Most beginning programs and tai chi interventions tested in medical research last at least 12 weeks, with instruction once or twice a week and practice at home. By the end of that time, you should know whether you enjoy tai chi, and you may already notice positive physical and psychological changes.

### **No pain, big gains**

Although tai chi is slow and gentle and doesn't leave you breathless, it addresses the key components of fitness — muscle strength, flexibility, balance, and, to a lesser degree, aerobic conditioning. Here's some of the evidence:

**Muscle strength.** Tai chi can improve both lower-body strength and upper-body strength. When practiced regularly, tai chi can be comparable to resistance training and brisk walking.

Although you aren't working with weights or resistance bands, the unsupported arm exercise involved in tai chi strengthens your upper body. Tai chi strengthens both the lower and upper extremities and also the core muscles of the back and abdomen.

**Flexibility.** Tai chi can boost upper- and lower-body flexibility as well as strength.

**Balance.** Tai chi improves balance and, according to some studies, reduces falls. Proprioception — the ability to sense the position of one's body in space — declines with age. Tai chi helps train this sense, which is a function of sensory neurons in the inner ear and stretch receptors in the muscles and ligaments. Tai chi also improves muscle strength and flexibility, which makes it easier to recover from a stumble. Fear of falling can make you more likely to fall; some studies have found that tai chi training helps reduce that fear.

**Aerobic conditioning.** Depending on the speed and size of the movements, tai chi can provide some aerobic benefits. If your clinician advises a more intense cardio workout with a higher heart rate than tai chi can offer, you may need something more aerobic as well.

***Stress and reduction of anxiety.*** *Most practitioners will explain the ‘sense of calm’ they feel when practising tai chi. Your entire focus is on the movements with body balance and mindfulness. It gradually calms the mind, opens the body and connects the spirit. Commitment to practise gradually deepens the awareness of self and all around us.*

#### Selected resources

An Introduction to Tai Chi [Harvard Health Special Report](#)

Public Info. Board & Training Resource List: [taichimastermoy.org](http://taichimastermoy.org)

*Additional comments in italics by Susan Lower-Vens. Susan is a Continuing Participant and Instructor of Master Moy's Tai Chi and is a retired martial artist.*