

Tai Chi may aid in arthritis treatment

By [Kat Carney](#)
CNN Headline News

(CNN) -- When it comes to working out, no exercise regimen is "one size fits all," but one particular martial art form comes pretty close. According to a review article in the Archives of Internal Medicine, the ancient martial art of Tai Chi not only improves strength, balance and flexibility in older people, but it also has positive effects on chronic health conditions like multiple sclerosis and joint problems.

In fact, the Arthritis Foundation has looked to Tai Chi as treatment for arthritis. The Arthritis Foundation's program is based on Dr. Paul Lam's "Tai Chi for Arthritis" program.

Lam, who is now 53, developed osteoarthritis in his 20s and used Tai Chi as a way to control the disease.

While there are no published studies proving whether Tai Chi can reduce pain and inflammation associated with arthritis, participants report benefits ranging from pain relief to lower blood pressure.

But even though Tai Chi appears to have numerous benefits to participants, it is still too early for physicians to begin prescribing Tai Chi as a remedy for chronic health problems because many of the past studies had design flaws, according to Dr. Chenchen Wang, the author of this most recent report.

Wang urges patients with chronic health problems take precautions before beginning a Tai Chi practice, because for some people Tai Chi could worsen joint problems and other symptoms of arthritis. So as the saying goes, be sure to check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.

Find this article at: <http://www.cnn.com/2004/HEALTH/03/12/tai.chi/index.html>

Why I choose Tai Chi: Advantages regarding Western Exercise

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I have been a lifelong exerciser using systems like the RCAF 5BX program, training for contact martial arts, weights, or running 40-60 miles per week, yet for the past ten years I have opted for Tai Chi and related Chi Gung as my primary health practice. Why? Moving into my mid-sixties I find it fulfills in a beautifully enfolded experience all the areas of my life needing refreshing human movement: the subtler layers of me in the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual self, not to exclude the social sphere. But let me simply compare my impressions of the physical elements I find so invigorating and strengthening, leaving Dr. Emily Cheng Koh (who organizes the Tai Chi classes at Swansea Town Hall for nearly the past decade) to explain how the rest is re-created through this training.

While Western systems of calisthenics and strength-building concentrate on the cardiovascular efficiency and maintaining/retaining muscle mass, Tai Chi works on the total body structure simultaneously to significantly improve the effective processes of the body and increase core strength. While exercising with the Western approach, the body becomes a mass to be hardened and shaped, subject to discipline & will-power in methods regulated to overcome resistance: “no pain, no gain.” In Tai Chi, rather than whip the body into shape and over-ride the pain message in order to build defined muscle mass and drop pounds quickly, the practice methodically deepens an attunement to the body-sense through moving every part of my anatomy while stretching joints/ligaments/soft tissues to open up habitually tight holding patterns through systematically augmenting circulation of every kind: blood, cerebro-spinal fluids, and energy flow itself. Instead of beating the body to perform at its limits, I find that fully sensing the body illuminates and unlocks the integration of its capacities while smoothly extending its fluency and well-being. Most Western training concentrates on target areas—abs, biceps, thighs---but the whole person is the focus of Tai Chi without separation so that symmetrical movement on left & right sides, arms & legs moving, dynamic rather than static balance, weight-shifting rather than weight-lifting notably intensifies vibrant body-sense and continuous self-awareness within rather than measured performance of reps or distance. The exquisite quality of “feel” is clearly superior: one’s body doesn’t just feel strong, it feels “alive” in every movement afterwards.

Emory University in Atlanta Georgia did a study of seniors who were given six weeks of Tai Chi training and found that the number of falls subsequently fell by 50%. That is an important finding since falls are the number one hazard in the home and more especially dangerous for seniors. But this self-paced system of gentle physical activity has benefits far beyond this practical effect; it is called ‘moving meditation’ because its exercise program systematically provides greater balance, but reduces stress while increasing flexibility for all fitness levels without a gym, locker room, high impact or any equipment beyond one’s own body-weight and effort. The exercise physiologists, notably at the

University of Illinois and Mayo Clinic, have measured increased oxygen uptake and efficient use, reduced blood pressure, delayed decline in cardiovascular levels, increased bone density, improvement in strength/motion of joints, more stable leg strength, knee improvement, reduced levels of stress hormones, improved immune-system effectiveness, and heightened mood states due to calming effects of practice. I could go on to talk about improved organ functions, better breathing, significant quality of improved sleep patterns, agility & co-ordination increase, overall relaxation, and reduced pain in chronic injuries or conditions, but I leave that for Dr. Cheng Koh and others more qualified. The unique mind-body link which is the focus of Tai Chi methods results in widespread reports of more strength, stamina, suppleness, and serenity in facing every day life challenges, something most Western exercises cannot address except through improved fitness levels in the physical sphere. It is safe, fun, engaging, and sociable without the major transition of the “workout.”

I am at an age where the choice between standing up to put my socks on or sitting down because it is easier marks a decline in functional flexibility and an increased fear of falling—Tai Chi has been a very positive antidote to the feeling of going downhill with its loss of confidence and limiting aging. From a physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual perspective integrated into who I am and my level of self-awareness & self-esteem, I find the beneficial improvements are remarkable and available to anyone at any stage of their life or fitness. Both quality and quantity of energy for living is significantly augmented by Tai Chi which is something far happier than my involvement of Western exercise offered me. If you want to find out for yourself, join the Summer Session beginning in April, Thursday nights at Swansea Town Hall from 6:30-7:45 by contacting Dr. Emily Cheng Koh or the Town Hall.