

## Health Benefits of Tai Chi

Tai chi is a traditional Chinese form of exercise that incorporates slow, low-impact purposeful movements and has been shown to strengthen multiple health-related areas. If you are looking to increase your health, especially in the areas of balance and flexibility, mental health, and reducing arthritis symptoms, tai chi may be a good fit.

One of the best-documented benefits of tai chi is enhanced balance among participants. According to an article published by Harvard Medical School, studies show that older adults who do hour-long tai chi sessions one to three times per week are 43% less likely to fall compared to those who chose other forms of exercise, as well as cut their risk of injury in half. Along with balance, tai chi has been shown to increase flexibility or range of motion in participants, as well as increase muscular strength.

Tai chi is also a great form of exercise for those who have arthritis. This mode of exercise has been shown to improve symptoms of arthritis by reducing pain and stiffness. According to a study out of Tufts University School of Medicine, “patients older than 65 with knee osteoarthritis who practiced a 60-minute tai chi class twice a week for 12 weeks showed a significant decrease in joint pain and stiffness compared with those in the control group”. For more information on this study, please see: <https://sites.tufts.edu/medicine/winter-2017/tai-chi-and-ailing-joints/> .

Along with other physical improvements, tai chi has also been shown to increase sleep quality in older adults, according to research done by the Oregon Research Institute as well as the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA). UCLA studies also suggested that tai chi helps people reduce high blood pressure as well as tension headaches. In addition, as seen in Forecast Diabetes Magazine, “A review published in 2017 in the medical journal *Frontiers in Immunology* looked at practices such as tai chi and concluded that, when done on a regular basis, they appear to slow down the activity of genes associated with inflammation and repair some of the cellular damage caused by stress”.

The benefits of tai chi do not stop at physical improvements. Harvard Medical School reports that tai chi can help reduce age-related cognitive decline, and may even slow dementia. Further, in 82% of studies, tai chi greatly improved mood and lowered anxiety. In addition, it was shown to be an effective treatment for depression; as there is a meditation component to tai chi, you focus your attention on bodily sensations such as the feeling of the ground beneath your feet as you go through the movements. This component aims at increasing mindfulness, which may reduce stress and enhance feelings of well-being, according to the article from Forecast Diabetes Magazine.

Tai chi is a safe, inexpensive form of exercise with multiple physical and mental benefits. If you are new to exercise and are looking to start a safe and effective exercise program, consider tai chi a great place to start. If you are already involved in an exercise program, consider adding tai chi to your existing routine for added benefits.

#### REFERENCES:

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