

# The Wellness Express™

Jump on the train to good health

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## New Research Reveals Numerous Benefits of Tai Chi

### Presented by:

Tai chi is an activity that is growing by leaps and bounds, especially among older adults. As more of them retire, baby boomers continue to look for exercise methods that can improve health but have a low risk of injury. Tai chi perfectly fits the bill. The slow, flowing movements of this supple martial art - along with the emphasis on deep breathing - help gently stretch the body, improve balance and slash stress.

New research released in the last two years boosts support for tai chi improving health. Long known for its musculoskeletal benefits, tai chi shows it can help heart patients, stroke victims and depression sufferers.

In this issue of Wellness Express, we jump into the latest research on this topic.

### The Origins of Tai Chi

Tai chi was first developed as a martial art in China over 1,000 years ago. It is closely associated with qigong - an ancient Chinese system of meditative breathing and movement. Practitioners of tai chi seek to cultivate the universal healing energy known as *qi* (pronounced *chee*), which flows throughout the body.

There are many different styles of tai chi, but almost all involve learning a sequential set of movements called forms. Each movement within a form usually has both a self-defense application and *qi* development strategy at its core. As you practice the form, you use meditative breathing to assist in circulating *qi* energy in your body and focusing your mind.

### Martial Art Meets Modern Medicine

And what has Western medicine discovered about tai chi in the last few years? Let's take a look.

#### Heart Failure & Stroke

According to research published in the Archives of *Internal Medicine*, tai chi offers several advantages for people suffering from chronic systolic heart failure, which causes the heart to weaken and unable to pump sufficient quantities of blood. At one time, exercise was not even recommended for patients with this heart condition.



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### Exercise of the Week

#### Plank Position with Feet on Ball

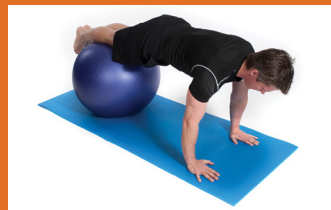
**Difficulty:** Easy to Moderate

(Consult your chiropractor before starting this or any other exercise.)

**Start:** Lie on ball, face down. Place hands on floor and lift both legs to position body in a push-up (plank) position. Keep abdominals contracted (tummy tucked in) and spine straight.

**Exercise:** Walk hands forward, maintaining a steady plank position. Most difficult position: only feet are left on ball. Hold at finish position for 15-30 seconds. Walk hands back to start position.

Repeat 3-5 times.



The study showed heart failure participants who attended tai chi classes twice a week for 12 weeks reported improvement in their quality of life, elevated mood and stronger confidence to perform exercise-related tasks. The control group, which received health education instead of tai chi classes, had no improvement in these same areas.<sup>1</sup>

Medical researchers at the University of Illinois and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University conducted a study on tai chi and stroke patients. The study authors found six weeks of tai chi practice helped patients dramatically improve their balance control.<sup>2</sup>

### Mental Disorders

Our high-paced, frantic world has no doubt increased the rates of depression and anxiety. About 10 percent of the American population suffers from depression.

A group of medical researchers analyzed 40 studies on tai chi and its mental health benefits. They concluded, "Tai chi appears to be associated with improvements in self-esteem and psychological well-being, including reduced stress, anxiety, depression and mood disturbance."<sup>3</sup>

### Musculoskeletal Health

Arthritis is one of the most disabling diseases in society. The George Institute for International Health published a comprehensive analysis on tai chi's impact on arthritis. After examining numerous studies researchers remarked tai chi helps boost pain relief and improve mobility among arthritis sufferers.<sup>4</sup>

A large study focusing on the Arthritis Foundation's tai chi program revealed that participants lowered pain levels, fatigue and stiffness.<sup>5</sup>

Arthritis of the knee is a common problem among seniors. In the US, knee osteoarthritis will affect half of all Americans who reach the age of 85.

At Tufts University of Medicine, researchers studying knee osteoarthritis noted patients with this health condition, that participated in a 12-week tai chi program, were able "to reduce pain and improve physical function, self-efficacy, depression, and health status for knee OA."<sup>6</sup>


According to research by Texas Tech University Health Sciences, a group of post-menopausal women who practiced tai chi and consumed 4 to 6 cups daily of green tea for six months saw improvement in their bone health. The research also revealed this group of women slashed levels of oxidative stress. The antioxidants found in green tea and the stress reduction from regular tai chi may be responsible for slashing inflammation caused by stress.<sup>7</sup>



**Always talk to your chiropractor before starting an exercise program to ensure it's suitable for you.**



### Quote to Inspire



*"Be not afraid of growing slowly; be afraid only of standing still."*

*- Chinese Proverb*

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