

What is tai chi?

Tai chi, which originated in China as a martial art, is a mind-body practice. It is sometimes referred to as "moving meditation." Practitioners move their bodies slowly, gently and with awareness while breathing deeply.

People practice tai chi by themselves or in groups. In the Chinese community, people commonly practice tai chi in nearby parks – often in the early morning before going to work.

There are many different styles, but all involve slow, relaxed, graceful movements, each flowing into the next. The body is in constant motion, and posture is important. Individuals practicing tai chi must also concentrate, putting aside distracting thoughts, and they must breathe in a deep and relaxed, but focused, manner.

People practice tai chi for various health-related purposes, such as:

- For benefits associated with low-impact, weight-bearing aerobic exercise
- To improve physical condition, muscle strength, coordination and flexibility
- To improve balance and decrease the risk of falls, especially in elderly people
- To ease pain and stiffness – for example, from osteoarthritis
- To improve sleep
- For overall wellness.

In general, studies of tai chi have been small, or they have had design limitations that may limit their conclusions. However, some studies suggest that tai chi helps with:

- Preventing falls among the elderly
- Improving cardiovascular fitness and overall well-being
- Enhancing the immune system.

Tai chi is a relatively safe practice. However, there are some cautions:

- As with any exercise regimen, if you overdo practice, you may have sore muscles or sprains.
- Tai chi instructors often recommend that you do not practice tai chi right after a meal, or when you are very tired, or if you have an active infection.
- If you are pregnant, or if you have a hernia, joint problems, back pain, fractures or severe osteoporosis, your health care provider may advise you to modify or avoid certain postures in tai chi.

Tai chi instructors do not have to be licensed, and the practice is not regulated by the federal government or individual states. In traditional tai chi instruction, a student learns from a master teacher. There is no standard training for instructors.

If considering tai chi, first:

- Do not use tai chi as a replacement for conventional care or to postpone seeing a doctor about a medical problem.
- If you have a medical condition or have not exercised in a while, consult with your health care provider before starting tai chi.
- Keep in mind that learning tai chi from a video or book does not ensure that you are doing the movements correctly and safely.
- Ask about the instructor's training and experience.
- Tell health care providers about any complementary and alternative practices. Provide a full picture of what is being done to manage your health.

Resources

- Taoist Tai Chi Society: www.taoisttaichi.org
- Tai Chi for Health Institute: www.taichiforhealthinstitute.org
- National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine: www.nccam.nih.gov

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

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