



Standing Firm Fitness

A Proactive Approach to Aging

How Tai Chi Works, written by Dr. Paul Lam

No matter what forms of tai chi, if specific tai chi principles are incorporated into tai chi practice, the result will be better balance and reduced falls. The principles are:

Movement control

Tai chi movements are slow, smooth and continuous, helping to strengthen internal muscles, like the deep stabilizers that support and strengthen the spine. Additionally, tai chi practitioners move against a gentle resistance to build full muscular strength. Slow and smooth movements calm the mind, helping to reduce falls resulting from sudden movements that lead to significant blood pressure drop, especially in elder people taking medication that can cause change of blood pressure.

Weight transference

Tai chi practitioners are mindful of transferring weight with each step, helping to improve mobility, coordination and balance. This, in addition to emphasis on upright and supple posture, further strengthens muscles.

Integration of mind and body

Tai chi is an internal art, which stresses the integration—and balance—of mind and body. Tai chi practitioners focus, calm their minds, and loosen and relax their joints and ligaments.

A number of studies indicate that being confident results in less falls, since the fear of falls increases the risk of falling. Practicing a mind-body exercise, such as tai chi, builds confidence, thus alleviating the fear of falling.

Instructor training for the Tai Chi for Arthritis program includes understanding these principles. Instructors then work with participants to incorporate them into real life situations.

Extra Benefit: Reduction of the Burden of Chronic Conditions.

Investing in tai chi programs can have cost savings in other areas. As the practice of tai chi improves many aspects of health, it can also be an ideal preventive intervention. The U.S. National Institute of Health's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine suggests that people practice tai chi for a variety of 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 for falls, especially in elderly people.
- To ease pain and stiffness—for example, from osteoarthritis.
- To improve sleep.
- For overall wellness.

The largest study about the practice of tai chi by people with arthritis, published in the Arthritis Care and Research Journal, found that the Tai Chi for Arthritis program not only reduced pain, but also improved the quality of life. It has also been found to improve standing balance for people with strokes as well as six out of eight measurements of quality of live for older adults. A study, recently accepted to be published in the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, followed 82 older women divided into tai chi and control groups. After six months, those practicing tai chi significantly increased knee extensor endurance and bone mineral density and had less fear of falling than the control group.

For more information on forming new classes in your area, finding a class or private instruction call mobile 469-964-9369 email chris@standingfirmfitness.com