

One in three adults over the age of 65 suffers a fall each year. Treatment of injuries due to falls is one of the largest expenditures for healthcare. Robust evidence indicates that Tai Chi is one of the most effective exercises to prevent falls. Dr. Paul Lam's "Tai Chi for Arthritis for Falls Prevention" program has been shown to not only help prevent falls, but also to improve health and quality of life for participants.



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Tai Chi
for
Arthritis
for
Falls
Prevention

Dr. Paul Lam



What is Tai Chi?

Tai Chi originated from ancient China and is now practiced throughout the world as an effective exercise for health of mind and body. Tai Chi is a graceful form of exercise that involves a series of movements, called forms, which are performed in a slow, focused manner combined with controlled breathing. It is a low impact exercise that puts minimal stress on muscles and joints, making it suitable for many older adults.

“Tai Chi for Arthritis”

In 1997 Dr. Paul Lam realized the need of a specially-designed tai chi program for people with arthritis. His team of tai chi associates and medical specialists created the 12 movement Tai Chi for Arthritis program based on the Sun style, which is especially beneficial for arthritis because it contains powerful Qigong exercises to enhance healing and agile steps to improve mobility. The program is now adapted by the Arthritis Foundation.

The program includes warm-up, cool-down, breathing exercises, and a set of 12-movement Tai Chi.

How Tai Chi Works:

No matter what form of Tai Chi is practiced, if specific principles are incorporated, the result will be better balance and reduced falls. The three basic principles are:

1. Movement control

Tai Chi movements are slow, smooth and continuous; they help 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 can lead to significant blood pressure drop, especially in elderly people taking medication that can cause blood pressure change.

2. 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.

3. 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. Practicing a mind-body exercise such as Tai Chi builds confidence, thus alleviating the fear of falling. A number of studies indicate that fearing a fall actually increases a person's risk.

How Does Tai Chi Help Prevent Falls?

Tai Chi has been proven to:

- ◆ Improve balance
- ◆ Increase leg strength
- ◆ Improve mobility
- ◆ Increase flexibility
- ◆ Improve psychological health
- ◆ Improve posture
- ◆ Reduce fear of falling

Added benefits include:

Relieve pain and stiffness, improve concentration, stress relief, improved heart and lung function, and integration of body and mind.



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