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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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Regular tai chi practice can improve posture, movement control, and ability to walk. The gradual weight shift in lower and upper limbs and slow foot movements like forward heel-to-toe and backward toe-to-heel also improve flexibility, stamina, and muscle tone. Moves from wide to narrow stances while turning also expands the types of situations under which the body experiences support.

The coordinated breathing used in tai chi helps to improve lung function, increase awareness, and reduce stress.

Taken together, these physical and mental aspects of tai chi work to improve balance and mobility while reducing fall risk. It also reduces markers of inflammation linked to many chronic diseases.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- Balance and fall risk
Several studies show that tai chi improves balance which may also help reduce fall risk.
- Fatigue
Clinical trials suggest that tai chi can help reduce fatigue in cancer patients.
- Pain
Tai chi can help with several types of pain including knee pain, low back pain, and fibromyalgia.
- Physical functioning
Tai chi can improve muscle strength, flexibility, stamina, and posture in a variety of populations including cancer patients.
- Sleep
Tai chi can improve sleep, including among cancer patients. One study found it had similar effects to cognitive behavioral therapy, the non-drug gold standard treatment for insomnia.

- Inflammation

Tai chi reduces markers of inflammation linked with many chronic diseases and disturbed sleep.

- Immune functioning

In a randomized trial of older adults, tai chi appeared to boost immune response to the shingles vaccine and the shingles virus.

What else do I need to know?

What Is It:

Based on Chinese philosophy and traditional medicine, tai chi is a movement therapy that seeks to harmonize the Yin and Yang vital forces and promote the flow of energy in the body known as Qi to improve health. It coordinates a series of prescribed movements with meditation and breathing exercises.

Clinical trials of tai chi have been conducted in elderly, frail, and disabled patients, and those with chronic conditions such as fibromyalgia, arthritis, Parkinson's disease, heart disease, and cancer. These studies show that tai chi can improve sleep, strength, stamina, flexibility, balance, limb function, immune function, blood pressure, mental outlook, and awareness. It can also help reduce stress, fall risk, inflammation, and bone loss.

Tai chi can be practiced by people of all age groups as the movements are gentle with little stress on the body. Like other mind-body approaches, benefits increase with regular practice.

Is It Safe:

- Tai chi is generally considered to be safe.
- Patients with muscle and bone injuries should consult their physician before starting tai chi practice.

Who Can Provide this Service:

Experienced tai chi instructors.

Where Can I Get Treatment:

Many hospitals, cancer centers, and community and senior centers offer tai chi classes. The [Integrative Medicine Service](#) at MSK offers tai chi and other exercise and mind-body modalities in our online program, [Integrative Medicine at Home](#), to help support the recovery and well-being of cancer patients everywhere.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Tai Chi (Tai Ji) - Last updated on November 2, 2022

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