



Tai Chi for Wellness

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According to a recent study published in the journal *Sleep*, a Westernized version of the ancient Chinese martial art of tai chi (TIE-chee), also called tai chi chih, has shown potential to help older people rest easier at night. Nearly two-thirds of people who learned the slow, gentle tai chi moves experienced significant improvements in sleep quality, compared to about one-third of those who participated in health education sessions that included information on how to get a better night's rest. In fact, the benefits of tai chi chih were similar to those seen with drugs or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), study chief Dr. Michael R. Irwin of the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA told Reuters Health.

Studies show that more than half of older adults experience sleeping problems at least a few times a week, Irwin and his team note in their report. While CBT can ease insomnia, few therapists have the training to offer this type of treatment, which is also relatively expensive.

And while aerobic exercise can also help people sleep better, vigorous workouts aren't an option for many seniors.

To investigate whether tai chi chih might be an option, Irwin and his team analyzed sleep quality in 112 people aged 59 to 86 participating in a randomized, controlled trial of the martial art for preventing shingles. Tai chi chih instruction was given in 45-minute sessions, three times a week for 25 weeks.

Tai chi is a noncompetitive, self-paced system of gentle physical exercise and stretching. To do tai chi, you perform a series of postures or movements in a slow, graceful manner. Each posture flows into the next without pausing. Anyone, regardless of age or physical ability, can practice tai chi. It doesn't take physical prowess. Rather, tai chi emphasizes technique over strength. Tai chi has also show potential to reduce stress, improve balance, flexibility, energy, stamina, muscular strength and agility for all ages.

Originally developed in China as a form of self-defense, tai chi is a graceful form of exercise that has existed for some 2,000 years. The graceful images of people gliding through dance-like poses as they practice tai chi are compelling. During tai chi, you focus on movement and breathing. This combination creates a state of relaxation and calm. Stress, anxiety and tension should melt away as you focus on the present, and the effects may last well after you stop your tai chi session. It is often described as "meditation in motion" because it promotes serenity through gentle movements— connecting the mind and body.

Tai chi has more than 100 possible movements and positions. It's best to find several that you like and stick with those, or explore the full range gradually. The intensity of tai chi varies somewhat depending on the form or style practiced. Some forms of tai chi are more fast-paced than others. However, most forms are gentle and suitable for everyone. Although tai chi is generally safe, consider talking with your doctor before starting a new program. This is particularly important if you have any problems with your joints, spine or heart.

Older adults may especially find tai chi appealing because the movements are low impact and put minimal stress on muscles and joints. Tai chi may also be helpful if you have arthritis or are recovering from an injury. Other benefits of participating in Tai Chi may be slowed bone loss in

women after menopause, lowered blood pressure improved cardiovascular fitness and reduced chronic pain.

Wondering how to get started in tai chi? Good news, you don't need any special clothing or equipment to do tai chi. It is best to use an instructional video or DVD. Most video instructor can teach you how to practice tai chi safely, especially if you have injuries, chronic conditions, or balance or coordination problems.

Although tai chi is slow and gentle, with virtually no negative side effects, injuries are possible if tai chi isn't performed properly. To reap the greatest stress reduction benefits from tai chi, consider practicing it regularly. Many people find it helpful to practice tai chi in the same place and at the same time every day to develop a routine. But if your schedule is erratic, do tai chi whenever you have a few minutes.

If you're interested in trying tai chi, check out these websites to get more information and products for home use.

<http://www.taichiforseniorsvideo.com/ordering.html>

<http://www.taichidepot.com/>

<http://www.gaiam.com/category/fitness-center/eastern-practices/tai-chi.do?gclid=S18376x028&keyword=tai%20chi%20workout>