



...Those new to t'ai chi AND those wanting to continue their t'ai chi practice are WELCOME to join this community event. In each session we will focus on our breath, engage in gentle movement, learn t'ai chi basic exercises and over time explore t'ai chi postures (movements).

What Are Studies Telling Us About T'ai Chi?

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PDF of handout is located at communityevents.mononaterrace.com under Health/Wellness Programs, T'ai Chi at Monona Terrace.

A common metaphor used in t'ai chi is “cotton over steel.” Through t'ai chi our body becomes both soft and strong. We find ourselves both relaxed and rooted. In our western world we use external weights to condition our body. We

lift steel in order to make our muscles grow in strength. In the world of t'ai chi we condition our bodies in a way that creates internal strength - often called jing.

This is power generated by chi, sometimes referred to as

our internal life energy. T'ai chi movements involve the interchange of yin/yang energy, are gentle and relaxed, yet increase muscle strength, flexibility, balance and provide some aerobic conditioning – all key to fitness.

An article entitled “The Health Benefits of Tai Chi” (Harvard Women’s Health Watch Newsletter, May 2009) references studies linking t'ai chi to muscle strength, flexibility, balance, and aerobic conditioning. The article also describes various studies that found t'ai chi to be beneficial to medical conditions such as: arthritis, low bone density, breast cancer, heart disease, heart failure, hypertension, Parkinson’s disease, sleep problems, and stroke. For more information about these fitness/medical findings go to: [health.harvard.edu/newsletters].

A small study published in the “Archives of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Studies” found practicing t'ai chi helps older adults maintain their balance when their eyes are closed. This supports another study [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11346836] where “elderly people

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who regularly practice t'ai chi showed better postural stability in the more challenged conditions than those who do not (e.g., the condition with simultaneous disturbance of vision and proprioception).” These and other studies suggest t'ai chi improves balance and may reduce the risk of falls. The thought is that t'ai chi, as a coordinated exercise of slow, continuous movements, is positively affecting one’s proprioception—the ability to sense the position of one’s body in space—which declines with age.

Practicing t'ai chi may also give a boost to one’s immune system. A UCLA study (published in the April 2007 issue of the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society) involving 112 healthy adults, evaluated the level of immunity against shingles. All participants had chickenpox in the past, were vaccinated in the study with a chickenpox vaccine, and then evaluated through periodic blood tests. After six months, the group practicing t'ai chi (3 times a week) had nearly twice the level of immunity against shingles than the education group (focusing on diet and stress management).

In the Harvard Magazine (May-June 2012) article entitled “Easing Ills through Tai Chi” Kathryn Kerr, a Harvard Medical School instructor, is quoted as saying, “Tai chi is a very interesting form of training because it combines a low-intensity aerobic exercise with a complex, learned, motor sequence. Meditation, motor learning, and attentional focus have all been shown in numerous studies to be associated with training-related changes—including, in some cases, changes in actual brain structure—in specific cortical regions.” See [<http://harvardmagazine.com/2010/01/researchers-study-tai-chi-benefits>] for the article written by Neil Potter Brown.

Evidence that t'ai chi is useful to our health and wellness is moving from anecdotal to scientific. With practice, our mind becomes cool/clear and our body becomes resilient. A strong core combined with a relaxed body/mind helps us navigate the world with less anxiety and more well-being.