

Tai Chi

If you read the local paper you may have seen advertisements about Tai Chi classes at senior centers, hospitals or health fairs. If you watch television, you may see commercials with people standing by the ocean moving slowly and peacefully for a variety of health advertisements. We know from movies like the Karate Kid that what we are seeing in those commercials is probably a form of martial arts and we may have even heard of Tai Chi, but what is Tai Chi?

Tai Chi is:

- Mind-body practice
- Originated in China
- Combination of body movements, meditation and breathing deeply
- Started as a martial art and use of energy to fight opponents

Tai Chi has been practiced across our world for centuries. It is a form of slow movement usually combined with either a quiet environment, sounds of nature or music and deep breathing exercises. At the recent Recovery Conference sponsored by CMSU Behavioral Health Services, Dr. William Klinger provided us with much information on Tai Chi and demonstrated a variety of techniques and movements. According to Dr. Klinger, an assistant professor in the department of psychiatry at Penn State University's College of Medicine and an adjunct faculty member for Penn State University where he has been teaching stress management, health education, exercise, fitness and kinesiology for the past 21 years, there are four elements of relaxation techniques used worldwide:

- Quiet Environment
- Comfortable Position
- Positive Attitude
- Deep Breathing

These combined with Tai Chi movements, can be very beneficial to our health and wellness. In fact, many practitioners believe Tai Chi:

1. Massages internal organs
2. Aids in gas exchange in lungs
3. Improves digestive tract function
4. Improves balance
5. Assists in calming and increases awareness

Some report other benefits and believe tai chi may even:

- delay aging
- prolong life
- aid in the treatment of heart disease, high blood pressure, arthritis, digestive problems, skin diseases, depression, cancer and other illnesses

***But according to my reading, no real scientific studies are available to prove or disprove any of these claims.

Although there is some disagreement regarding the extent of health benefit claims, most seem to agree that Tai Chi:

- Is a form of exercise
- Improves balance
- May improve sleep
- May ease stiffness or arthritic symptoms
- Decreases fall risk especially for elderly
- Improves overall health such as muscle tone, coordination and flexibility

We are seeing a growth in the use of Tai Chi in our nation especially with the older adult population due to the health benefits as listed above and lack of stress on the body that you may experience with other martial arts or other forms of exercise. As with anything, one must try it first and determine the benefits for themselves.

For more information on Tai Chi please review the below list of sources I found helpful:

- “Stretch your Mind and Body: Tai Chi as an adaptive Activity” by Dr. William Klinger and Dr. Crider.
- www.TaiChiDocs.com
- www.tai-chi.com
- www.taichihealth.net

There is much more information on the internet about martial arts, Tai Chi and health benefits for your review. Discussing this interest with your physician or health care provider prior to starting any new program is recommended and may also assist you with finding resources on this topic or a local provider.

Wellness Information and Webpage by Kathleen Dunkelberger Nursing Consulting Services, LLC
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