

Tai Chi for Arthritis

Arthritis is one of the most common medical problems in the world and the number one cause of disability in America. The word *arthritis* is a blend of the Greek words *arthron*, for joint, and *itis*, for inflammation. In other words, *arthritis* literally means "joint inflammation." Although arthritis is often referred to as one disease, it's not. There are more than 100 forms of arthritis.

Benefits of Exercise as an Arthritis Treatment

A tailored program that includes a balance of three types of exercises -- range-of-motion, strengthening and endurance -- can relieve the symptoms of arthritis and protect joints from further damage. Exercise may also:

- Help maintain normal joint movement
- Increase muscle flexibility and strength
- Help maintain weight to reduce pressure on joints
- Help keep bone and cartilage tissue strong and healthy
- Improve endurance and cardiovascular fitness

Tai Chi Practice and Arthritis

The practice of Tai Chi helps reduce arthritis pain by increasing circulation and stimulating repair of damaged joint surfaces. In addition, it stabilizes joint structure by strengthening the soft tissue support of the joint.

Practicing Tai Chi will not "wear out" a damaged joint. Joints and muscles need to be exercised to prevent stiffness and weakness. The stretching and strengthening function of practicing Tai Chi will help strengthen the muscles and ligaments surrounding a joint, which in turn will protect and reduce stress on the joint. For example, stronger thigh muscles take some of the stress off of weight-bearing joints such as the knees and hips.

Practicing Tai Chi will also make you feel better and help you maintain a healthy weight. As pain decreases, one's outlook on life can improve. Less pain also promotes greater physical function of the affected joint and decreases the adverse mental affects related to living with arthritic pain.

Tai Chi Practice is Good Because.....

As stated earlier, a good exercise program is one that includes a balance of three types of exercises -- range-of-motion, strengthening and endurance. Tai Chi meets all three of these criteria.

Range-of-Motion (Flexibility)

Range-of-motion exercises (also called stretching or flexibility exercises) help maintain normal joint function by increasing and preserving joint mobility and flexibility. During Tai Chi practice we continuously and gently straighten and bend the joints in a controlled manner as far as they comfortably will go. Consequently the joints are stretched progressively farther (maintaining comfort levels) until normal or near-normal range is achieved and maintained.

Muscle Strengthening

Strong muscles help keep weak joints stable and comfortable and protect them against further damage. The Tai Chi postures help maintain or increase muscle strength.

Endurance

Arthritic joints and tissues need a good supply of blood and oxygen for healing. Better circulation of blood, fluid and oxygen also help to keep joints flexible and muscles strong. The practice of Tai Chi provides a low-impact cardiorespiratory exercise that helps strengthen the heart and lungs and increases stamina. In addition, the deep, rhythmic breathing (increased oxygen intake) and progressive muscle relaxation (increased blood flow) enables a more efficient supply of oxygen-rich blood to the entire body and has significant impacts on improving an arthritis sufferer's overall general health.

Tai Chi Practice is Also Effective Because.....

Correct Posture

Correct body posture is important. When the posture is correct, there will be less wear of the joints and muscles. When your posture is upright, the lung space is larger and the body, as a whole functions better.

The Power of the Mind

It is well known that mind can help promote healing. Tai Chi integrates body and mind, using the conscious mind to direct the internal energy and through intent, to direct each movement. When practicing Tai Chi one focuses on good posture, the movements and the co-ordination of the body. The mental training in Tai Chi will enhance clarity of the mind, improve relaxation and uplift mood.

The Power of Qi

Qi is the life energy inside a person. Qi circulates throughout the body, performing many functions to maintain good health. The stronger Qi you have, the healthier and stronger you are.

The gentle and slow movements of Tai Chi opens up one's energy channels and keep them strong and supple; the rhythmic movements of the muscle, spine and joints pump energy through the whole body. Tai Chi is one of the most effective exercises for Qi cultivation.

The Practical Advantage

Tai Chi is a progressive exercise in the sense that no matter at what age you start, you can continue to improve your skill. The more one progresses the more intriguing and effective it becomes. Tai Chi has great depth. Like peeling an onion, there is always a layer inside another layer.