

## Seniors and Tai Chi: A Winning Combination

Although used as a form of exercise today, *tai chi* is actually an ancient Chinese martial art, which combines breathing techniques, meditation and body movements, all performed in slow motion. First taught as a form of self-defense, *tai chi* is now practiced by tens of millions of people daily as a means of reducing stress, and enhancing well-being. A recent study suggests that *tai chi* can also be used by the elderly to help improve their balance, thus reducing the risk of falling.

In the study, a group of elderly people who were prone to falls enrolled in a 12-week *tai chi* exercise program. *Tai chi* was performed three times a week for 12 weeks. Before and after the study, researchers conducted tests on the *tai chi* patients to determine any changes in fitness levels, along with any incidences of falling.

Patients who participated in the *tai chi* program showed significantly improved muscle strength in their knees and ankles, and improvements in flexibility and mobility, compared to a control group. *Tai chi* patients were also 38 percent less likely to experience a fall than the control patients, and felt much more confident about being able to avoid a fall.

*Tai chi* is a safe, inexpensive, low-intensity exercise that can be performed in almost any setting. This makes it an ideal form of exercise for the elderly, especially those who may have limited movement or may be living in assisted care facilities. For more information about this and other types of exercise, visit <http://www.chiroweb.com/find/archives/senior/seniorfitness/index.html>.

Choi JH, Moon JS, Song R. Effects of Sun-style *tai chi* exercise on physical fitness and fall prevention in fall-prone older adults. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, July 2005;51(2):150-157.



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