

About Tai Chi, Taiji, or fully as Taijiquan

Tai Chi (Chinese: 太極; pinyin: Tàijí), short for T'ai chi ch'üan or Tàijí quán (太極拳), is an internal Chinese martial art practiced for both its defense training, its health benefits and meditation. The term taiji is a Chinese cosmological concept for the flux of yin and yang, and 'quan' means fist. So, etymologically, Taijiquan is a fist system based on the dynamic relationship between polarities (Yin and Yang). Though originally conceived as a martial art, it is also typically practiced for a variety of other personal reasons: competitive wrestling in the format of pushing hands (tui shou), demonstration competitions and achieving greater longevity. As a result, a multitude of training forms exist, both traditional and modern, which correspond to those aims with differing emphasis. Some training forms of Tai Chi are especially known for being practiced with relatively slow movements.

Today, Tai Chi has spread worldwide. Most modern styles of Tai Chi trace their development to at least one of the five traditional schools: Chen, Yang, Wu (Hao), Wu and Sun. All the former, in turn, trace their historical origins to Chen Village.

Tai Chi is often described as "meditation in motion," but it might well be called "medication in motion." There is growing evidence that this mind-body practice, which originated in China as a martial art, has value in treating or preventing many health problems. And you can get started even if you aren't in top shape or the best of health.

In this low-impact, slow-motion exercise, you go without pausing through a series of motions named for animal actions, for example, "white crane spreads its wings" - or martial arts moves, such as "box both ears." As you move, you breathe deeply and naturally, focusing your attention, as in some kinds of meditation, on your bodily sensations. Tai Chi differs from other types of exercise in several respects. The movements are usually circular and never forced, the muscles are relaxed rather than tensed, the joints are not fully extended or bent, and connective tissues are not stretched.

The essential principles include mind integrated with the body; control of movements and breathing; generating internal energy, mindfulness, song (loosening 松) and jing (serenity 靜). The ultimate purpose of Tai Chi is to cultivate the qi or life energy within us to flow smoothly and powerfully throughout the body. Total harmony of the inner and outer self comes from the integration of mind and body, empowered through healthy qi through the practice of Tai Chi.

The flowing movements of Tai Chi contain much inner strength, like water flowing in a river, beneath the tranquil surface there is a current with immense power—the power for healing and wellness. With consistent practice, people will be able to feel the internal energy (qi 氣), convert it to internal force (jing 勁) and use it to generate more internal energy. This process would greatly enhance Tai Chi development, leading to a more balanced mental state; at the same time your fitness, agility and balance will improve. The unique feature of Tai Chi is that it is internal. Internal means building the inner strength from inside out, therefore you can continue to develop at any age.

Numerous studies have shown Tai Chi improves muscular strength, flexibility, fitness, improves immunity, relieves pain and improves quality of life. Muscle strength is important for supporting and protecting joints and is essential for normal physical function. Flexibility exercises enable people to move more easily, and facilitate circulation of body fluid and blood, which enhances healing. Fitness is important for overall functioning of the heart, lungs, and muscles. In addition to these components, Tai Chi movements emphasize weight transference to improve balance and prevent falls.

Aside from the health benefits, Tai Chi runs deep and strong. It's easy to learn and becomes a way of life for many practitioners. Yet, because of its depth, no one ever knows it all, and thereby lies the fascination and the never-ending challenge of the art. There will be times, no matter how brief, when a practitioner will enter a mental stage of tranquility, moving to a different world, time, and space, a world where there is no schedule, no hustle and bustle. Yet the person still feels very much a part of the world. In a non-religious sense, it's a spiritual experience. Such an experience is so satisfying that it is beyond words. Being part of the world, being in harmony with the world and nature, thus is the paradox of Tai Chi, health and beyond.

Tai Chi is perhaps the most effective way to develop balanced health for the body and the mind. It develops:

- Improved overall health
- Calmness and focus of mind
- Increased energy
- Suppleness, strength, co-ordination, balance, and agility
- Relaxation and freedom from stress
- Strengthening of the internal functions of the body, such as the immune system, metabolic functions, and cardiovascular system
- Understanding of the body's processes and self-healing
- Harmony with the natural laws of human life

It is an ancient, time-tested traditional Chinese method of self-development, and is a subtle blend of the most refined Medical, Meditative and Martial knowledge combining self-discipline, graceful movement and effortless power.

Students develop increasing physical and mental skills, as awareness and understanding of all aspects of their self increases. You can learn and practice Tai Chi at your individual pace, and, as there are ever-new levels, throughout the rest of your life. These disciplines rely on a mindful re-discovery of the body to enrich and inspire one's experience of any aspect of life.

Practitioners of yoga, dance or other martial arts often find that the internal and flowing approach of Tai Chi perfectly complements their own training.