



Who, What, Where, When, Why & How of Tai Chi for Optimal Aging

Kristi Hallisy PT, DSc



Tai Chi



Balance, Tranquility, Strength

Background: Healthy aging is a goal of every adult. Optimal aging involves physical, mental and social wellness. Mobility and functional skills are key components of maintaining independence, community engagement and quality of life. Tai Chi (TC) is a tool that can advance all aspects of wellness through both individual and group practice.

Benefits of TC Practice on Chronic Health Conditions¹

Excellent Evidence	Good Evidence	Fair Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Falls prevention Osteoarthritis Parkinson's disease COPD (lung disease) Cognitive capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depression Cardiac rehabilitation Stroke rehabilitation Cognitive impairment and dementia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of life for patients with cancer Fibromyalgia Hypertension Osteoporosis

Guidelines for Tai Chi Practice²

- ✓ **Mindfulness** - focus on the present moment (centering)
- ✓ **Postural alignment** - hold body in an upright posture
- ✓ **Breath Awareness** - relaxed, natural diaphragmatic breathing
- ✓ **Active Relaxation** - foster a state of relaxed inner stillness
- ✓ **Slow movement** - build muscle strength and endurance
- ✓ **Weight Separation** - enhance postural control and balance
- ✓ **Integrated Movement** - proximal stability for distal mobility



TAI CHI POSTURE

Who can practice TC?	Persons of all ages and abilities. TC can be modified from its free standing form to standing with side support or walker, or seated versions. ²
What is TC?	Tai chi is a form of <i>qigong</i> (energy cultivation). It is an ancient Chinese martial art which fosters efficient and effective use of mental and physical energy with natural postures and movements. ²⁻³
Where to practice TC?	Anywhere! Tai chi requires no special equipment or clothing. Flat comfortable shoes or bare feet and a few square feet of space is all you need. ²⁻³
When to practice TC?	Pick a time in your day that is best for you , and work to be consistent in your practice. Tai chi can be a great way to start and end your day, but truly the movements of TC are so functional they can be applied to any daily task. ²⁻³
Why should I do TC?	Many chronic health conditions benefit from TC (see table). The general health benefits of TC include: balance, aerobic capacity, muscle strength & flexibility, cardiovascular health, bone density, emotional well-being (anxiety), chronic pain (low back pain), sleep quality and immune response. ¹
How to practice TC?	Neuromuscular (balance training) = 10-15 min/day with 2-3 longer sessions per week. ²⁻³

REFERENCES

- Hutson & McFarlane. Health benefits of Tai Chi: What is the evidence? *Can Fam Physician*, 2016.
- Yu T, Hallisy KH. Tai Chi Fundamentals® The Adapted Program with Optional Side Support, Walker Support, and Seated Versions [Book/DVD]. Taos NM: Uncharted Country Publishing, 2015.
- Tai Chi Health: Tai Chi with Tricia Yu. Available at: <http://taichihealth.com/>.