



T'ai Chi for Osteoporosis & Falls Prevention

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How Does T'ai Chi Work For Osteoporosis?

Tai chi is an increasingly popular exercise because it is enjoyable and beneficial for health. Suitable exercise is an important part of the treatment for people with osteoporosis.

Tai chi works by slowing down bone loss, improving balance, reducing falls, and improving quality of life. A specially designed tai chi program has advantages in terms of safety and efficacy.

What is tai chi?

"Tai chi is sometimes described as 'meditation in motion.'... Purported health benefits include increased flexibility, greater balance and reduced stress..."

Mayoclinic.com

There are numerous forms of tai chi, each with significant differences in terms of physical exertion. **Some are not suitable for people with Osteoporosis.**

The majorities of tai chi styles, however, are slow and gentle and can be suitable for people with osteoporosis. Tai chi movements are fluid and graceful, although they can be difficult to learn, for example, the most popular Yang style has a set of 108 forms that can take an average student two years to complete. Well-modified forms for health benefits are safer and easier to learn.

A Special Designed Program - Tai Chi for Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis mostly affects older people who often suffer from other medical problems. An exercise that can improve not only osteoporosis but also any other medical conditions should be therefore be considered. It is also important to enjoy the exercise otherwise it won't be adhered to.

There are many ways that tai chi works well for people with osteoporosis and other conditions. Listed below are the important factors supported by medical studies.

Bone Loss

An excellent study showed tai chi slowed down the loss of bone mineral density approximately three fold. Another study indicated that people who practice tai chi regularly have higher bone mineral density and better flexibility, muscle strength and balance.

Falls Prevention

Many studies have shown that tai chi reduces falls. This is especially important because when people with osteoporosis fall they are more likely to sustain a fracture. A fracture can be a very serious problem; for example hip fractures have a mortality rate of approximately 50%. It also seriously affects your quality of life. Tai chi has also been shown to improve balance and strength so even if you fall, you have a lesser chance of serious injury.

Associated Conditions

People with osteoporosis often have arthritis, loss of function due to age and weakness. Studies have shown that tai chi relieves pain from arthritis, improves balance and the ability to do daily activities.

Stress

People with chronic conditions such as osteoporosis are more likely to be mentally stressed and depressed because of the increasing inability to function normally on a day-to-day basis. Tai Chi has been shown to improve the mind, help people feel more relaxed and improve mental strength so they can cope better with chronic diseases.

The Advantage of a Modified Program

Tai chi was originally a complex martial art. Its training method was very strict and physically demanding, nowadays most people use tai chi for its health benefits. With the change of focus, the art serves people better when it is modified for the purpose of improved health. Most research studies on tai chi are based on modified health forms. The ideal way to compose a designed program should include health professionals in the respective field and tai chi experts of different styles.

Dr Paul Lam's Program was developed in conjunction with senior medical professionals in many countries and trialed over several years.

It is important to know a little bit about tai chi and to understand that it is a very different exercise from what we are used to in the western world. We are used to exercise being fast and strong, whereas tai chi emphasises the balance of nature so hardness and softness are balanced. Tai chi works through internal strengthening, which means that the internal organs, deep or core muscles and the mind are strengthened. Therefore physical exertion is minimised so that there is less risk of injury. In tai chi you are required to move slowly, to be aware of your body and use your mind to control your movements. Tai chi works on the ancient Chinese understanding of nature in that a movement usually travels in a curve or takes a circular path instead of a straight line as we are used to.

Getting accustomed to the speed, the control, the mind components and moving circular rather than straight, may take a little time. We have found that most of our students take about three months to get over that feeling of clumsiness and then they begin to enjoy their tai chi. In most of our scientific studies, we have found that if we can keep students interested for more than six months, they tend to adhere to tai chi for life; that is almost addictive!

Tai chi has an intrinsic attraction; once you understand that initially it takes a little time to get used to it, it is not hard to work toward staying around for 3 to 6 months.