



Tai Chi for Better Health

What is it?

Tai Chi for Better Health is an enjoyable exercise that can improve balance, relieve pain, and improve health and ability to do things. It is a slow exercise. It is easy to learn and good for all ability levels. The essential principles of Tai Chi include mind and body integration, fluid movements, controlled breathing and mental concentration. Tai Chi is one of the most effective exercises for the health of mind and body. It helps people to relax and feel better.

Who is it for?

Tai Chi for Better Health is best suited for community-dwelling older adults and people with a history of falls, balance disorders, leg muscle weakness, abnormal gait, or walking difficulty. It can be done seated and it can accommodate people with a mild level of mobility difficulty (e.g., occasional cane users).

What does it do?

The program focuses heavily on the development of functional balance. It has been heavily researched, with initial, exploratory studies showing the value of Tai Chi in reducing falls. The largest study of Tai Chi for Better Health (also known as Tai Chi for Arthritis), by Professor Leigh Callahan and colleagues from the University of North Carolina, shows significant health benefits for people with all types of arthritis. This landmark study was published at the *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity*, 2016. It was found that there was significant pain relief, less stiffness and better ability to manage daily living. The participants felt better about their overall wellness, as well as experiencing improved balance. The program is also proven to reduce pain and increase socialization.

> For class information and to register, visit healthylivingforme.org

How to Discuss With Patients

Older adults highly value their independence and worry about the implications of being labeled as a fall risk. They may not openly discuss fears or concerns they have about falling. As such, it may be necessary for you to initiate the discussion. It is important to highlight to your patient that the goal of this program is to keep him or her independent, active, and at home for as long as possible. You should emphasize that the program is safe and fun and that, although Tai Chi may seem unusual in Western culture, it has been shown to be very helpful for this purpose and in this form. It may also be useful to highlight the social benefits of the program and the fact that many patients like him or her have benefited from both the exercise and the group classes.