

Conscious spirituality in search of truth...



TAI CHI: NATIONAL CENTER FOR COMPLIMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE HEALTH

Tai Chi is a mind-body-spirit health practice first originating in China and now practised daily by millions of people across the world either singularly, or in small groups at neighbourhood parks. Like yoga tai chi health benefits are well recognised as an essential practice for achieving mind-body-spirit balance. Since the 1980s after attending my first class held by The Academy of Tai Chi at Blacktown, NSW I have experienced different forms of tai chi. Currently, I practice tai chi in the back yard of our home.

A 2017 academic research study of tai chi amongst older persons titled “Building the Understanding of the Effects of Tai Chi Training on Walking in Older People,” was conducted by National Centre for Complementary and Integrative Health, NCCIH. The research was initiated to determine potential benefits relating to gait speed for older persons over a six month period. The report included a health well-being component. An extract from the NCCIH report follows.

—Philip Crouch, Tasmania, 2020

NCCIH: BUILDING THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE EFFECTS ...

‘Could tai chi help address some of the walking problems, including the risk of falling, that often plague older people? This preliminary clinical trial adds to the growing evidence that the answer may be yes. The trial, funded by NCCIH and conducted by a team led by researchers at Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, found that as little as 6 months of tai chi training might improve an important indicator of how well a person can walk: gait dynamics. Tai chi is a multi-component mind and body approach that originated in China.

Declines in walking ability with age have been linked to a wide range of health issues as well as increased risks of falls and death from all causes. Gait, or the way in which one walks, has thus become a research target. Gait enlists many systems throughout the body and has them work together in complex ways. One aspect that has not been much studied is “long-range gait dynamics” – how much people’s gaits fluctuate and change over time when they walk.

This study compared gait speed and gait dynamics in 27 tai chi experts (with at least 5 years of tai chi experience) and 60 people of similar ages who had never practiced tai chi.



These 60 people were then randomly assigned to two groups: one group received 6 months of tai chi training, while the other group (the control group) was placed on a wait list. Gait was assessed at 0, 3, and 6 months. During gait testing, participants walked for 10 minutes at their preferred pace, and wireless switches on their heels and toes captured data on multiple aspects of gait.

All 87 participants were very healthy adults aged 50 to 79. The team found that the tai chi experts had gait dynamics indicative of better gait health.

Six months of tai chi training led to a slight trend in the same direction, but it didn't reach statistical significance. Tai chi was not associated with gait speed. More tai chi class attendance and home practice appeared to be of some benefit (though this did not reach statistical significance). The ¹ authors noted that tai chi may exert its effects by maintaining or improving our flexibility to respond and adapt to unpredictable changes in terrain, stimuli, and stresses when we walk.

NCCIH: WHAT THE TEAM FOUND!

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The authors cited a need for larger and longer randomized trials to more definitely ascertain whether tai chi can beneficially affect age-related gait dynamics, especially in people with impaired gait, e.g., from Parkinson's disease. The study's limitations included its small sample size and the possibility that factors other than tai chi training caused differences between the experts and the other participants.”

¹ Gow BJ, Hausdorff JM, Manor B, et al. Can tai chi training impact fractal stride time dynamics, an index of gait health, in older adults? Cross-sectional and randomized trial studies. PLoS One. 2017;12(10):e0186212.



Suggested resources:

National Centre for Complimentary and Integrative Health - *Tai Chi Building the Understanding of the Effects of Tai Chi Training on Walking, in Older People U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, NCCIH. Online Article.*
<https://nccih.nih.gov/research/results/spotlight/TaiChi-Walking-Older-People>
Tai Chi For Beginners - Dr Paul Lam, *Free Introductory Lesson, You Tube Clip:*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIOHGrYCEJ4>

Tai Chi practice groups locally may be found through newspapers, websites, or notice boards. Definitely worth the search effort.

