

Article

Tai Chi for arthritis

Studies have shown the 'Tai Chi for Arthritis' programme to relieve pain, improve quality of life and balance.

[Print](#)



Note from NRAS: Before embarking upon any exercise programme, it is wise to consult your doctor, rheumatology team or physiotherapist. This article is based on the 'Tai Chi for Arthritis' (also known as 'Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention') programme that was created by Dr Lam and his team and is conducted by certified instructors, but there are other tai chi classes available across the UK, though not all of them will be run specifically for arthritis, so always make the tutor aware of your condition before starting an exercise class.

Study after study shows that exercise is essential for overall health and can make major improvements in all aspects of health.

Over the last decade, tai chi has been recognised as a popular exercise for health improvement. In particular, studies have shown the 'Tai Chi for Arthritis' programme to relieve pain, improve quality of life and balance. By 2022 over ten million people around the world have enjoyed learning this programme. This article provides information and practical guides on how to use tai chi to help manage your condition.

Paul Lam

It will discuss:

1. What is tai chi?
2. The 'Tai Chi for Arthritis' programme
3. How does it work?
4. How to learn Tai Chi for Arthritis
5. Special precautions for people with rheumatoid arthritis

1. What is Tai Chi?

Tai chi originates from ancient China. Nowadays, it is practised throughout the world as an effective exercise for health. Most forms of tai chi consist of fluid, gentle movements that are relaxed and slow in tempo. Suitably modified tai chi forms have many advantages in terms of ease to learn, being safe to practice and scientifically proven effective for pain relief and better quality of life. 'Tai Chi for Arthritis' has been modified using medical knowledge and up-to-date teaching methods; it can be practised almost anywhere, and by just about anyone.

There are many different forms of tai chi with significant differences between them. Among the better-known forms are the more athletic Chen style which includes jumping in the air, kicking and punching. These forms are suitable for younger and more athletic students. The most popular forms are Yang, which features gentle and expansive movements suitable for more people, though there are some movements with high risk of injury, especially for people with arthritis. Then there are the Sun forms which are especially suitable for people with arthritis because they feature higher stance (less deep knee bending), more mobility exercise and special healing and relaxation benefits.

2. The 'Tai Chi for Arthritis' Programme

Tai Chi for Arthritis is a specially designed programme for people with arthritis. In 1997, Dr Lam worked with a team of tai chi and medical experts to design the Tai Chi for Arthritis programme based on Sun style tai chi. It is easy-to-learn, safe and effective. By 2019 over thirty published studies have shown this programme to relieve pain, improve quality of life and balance as well as being effective in preventing falls. It is recommended by Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) for falls prevention. Studies have also shown that it is safe for people with arthritis. Most people like the teaching method and enjoy the exercise.

The Tai Chi for Arthritis programme includes warm-up, wind-down, Qigong (a breathing exercise that can help aid relaxation), special precautions and 12 Sun style tai chi movements. It is now being recommended and taught through many arthritis foundations and organisations worldwide, including Arthritis Foundation USA, Arthritis Care UK and Arthritis Foundations Australia and Singapore.

3. How does it work?

An effective programme for arthritis, in fact, for most aspects of health, should incorporate exercises that improve muscular strength, flexibility and fitness.

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. Many arthritic conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, scleroderma and spondylitis are characterised by joint stiffness and impaired physical function. Tai chi frees up the stiff joints and muscles gently. Fitness is important for overall health and proper functioning of the heart, lungs and muscles. Tai Chi for Arthritis can improve all of these components.

In addition to these, Tai Chi for Arthritis focuses on weight transference, which helps balance and prevents falls, especially for older adults. It has been shown by a number of published studies to relieve pain, improve quality of life and balance. The world's largest study using tai chi for falls prevention in the community (The Sydney Tai Chi Trial) has shown it reduces the risk of recurrent falls by 67%. Other benefits include reducing stress, improving depression and immunity. The simple and easy-to-learn Tai Chi for Arthritis programme is designed to prevent and improve most chronic conditions.

Tai Chi for Arthritis cultivates the flow of qi (pronounce as chee) through the body. According to traditional Chinese medicine, qi is the life energy that circulates throughout the body, performing many functions to maintain good health. Practising Tai Chi for Arthritis helps to strengthen your qi, therefore improving health.

4. How to Learn Tai Chi for Arthritis

You can use Dr Lam's online lessons (www.onlinetaichilessons.com) or instructional DVD, which is designed as though you are learning in his class with 12 lessons, or his online lessons, so you can do the exercises in the comfort of your own home. Preferably or as well as the DVD, Dr Lam recommends attending one of the many thousands of Tai Chi for Health Institute's certified instructors. The book 'Overcoming Arthritis' written by Dr Paul Lam and Judith Hortsman contains comprehensive information about arthritis and the programme with many photos and detailed instructions.

You can find classes and order the instructional DVD and book through? www.taichiforhealthinstitute.org. Many retail stores such as? www.amazon.co.uk?and some arthritis foundations carry the instructional material.

5. Special Precautions for People with Rheumatoid Arthritis

People with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can have different severity and challenges. Your health professionals know your condition best and are the best source of giving you specific advice, so please consult your health professionals before you start tai chi. Be sure to ask what specific precautions you need to observe. Bring this article to show them, let them know that the programme? Tai Chi for Arthritis?is designed to be safe for people with arthritis and that the physical demand is similar to walking, and it came with appropriate adaptation for people with different disabilities.

Our certified instructors are trained to work with you and your health professional to help you to learn the programme safely and enjoyably. You can find the article?'[Safety First](#)' with more information on Dr Lam's website, under Articles/health.?In general, it is a good idea for you to listen to your body and work well within your comfort zone. Do talk to your health professional and tai chi instructor if you experience any pain or discomfort. The Arthritis Foundation has a good guide that if you experience pain for more than two hours after exercise, you should ease off at the next session.

With care and perseverance, Dr Lam is sure you will soon find?Tai Chi for Arthritis?enjoyable and helpful to your condition. He has personally met many people with RA who have greatly improved their condition after three months of practising?Tai Chi for Arthritis. Dr Lam is now by 2022 age 74; he has osteoarthritis since age of 13. Tai Chi has helped him to be healthy and overcome his arthritis. You can see how strong and flexible he is in the documentary "Anyone Can Learn Tai Chi".

© Copyright Dr Paul Lam. Reproduction for non-profit educational purposes is permitted.

Updated: 12/07/2022

This article was downloaded from www.nras.org.uk. National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS) is a registered charity in England and Wales (1134859) and Scotland (SC039721). A private company limited by guarantee. Registered in England and Wales (7127101).