

Dear Age Sage,

I recently read about a Tai Chi class starting in my area. It talked a lot about it helping with balance issues. Is it a meditation class or an exercise class? Is it appropriate for a 73 year old with arthritis?

Signed,

Wondering

Dear Wondering:

The answer to your question, “is Tai Chi meditation or exercise”, is that in a way it is both. Tai Chi is a unique combination of flowing movements and quiet meditation, based on Chinese philosophies that advocate for health, vitality and longevity. Researchers are now discovering that this ancient art form has the power to significantly improve quality of life - physically, mentally and spiritually. In a growing body of clinical trials, scientists are finding this is especially true for older adults. Studies have shown that Tai Chi can help seniors with everything from their balance and blood pressure to their sleeping, strength and ability to handle pain. Even more profound for many older adults is the deepened sense of spirituality and relaxation they say they gain from the exercise. Many people are confused and think that Tai Chi has a religious connotation, when it really is a form of physical activity and relaxation.

Master Yang Yang, a Tai Chi expert who has been researching its benefits among seniors as a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois, states that “Tai Chi is simple to learn, low-impact, provides a range of movements to gradually improve, doesn’t need any equipment and can be practiced anywhere.” Yang goes on to say, “It offers a broad scope of benefits, including feelings of tranquility and happiness.” By improving participant’s balance, lower body muscle strength and flexibility, Tai Chi can help older adults reduce their risk of falling.

One of the practices of Tai Chi is to bring participants into the present moment and help them learn to relax and focus their mind and body.

Traditional Tai Chi practice includes three major components:

- Qi Gong, which is the quiet, meditative component done standing or sitting. Participants learn to relax their bodies, breathe deeply and release their worries and tension.
- Tai Chi Forms, which are a set of choreographed slow, flowing movements. Participants improve their postural control and balance, flexibility, coordination, agility, strength, sensitivity, reaction time and confidence.
- Push-Hands, which is two-person balance, strength and reaction training, is not typically used with older adults.

“Tai Chi is not just physical - there’s also a mind-body component,” explained Tricia Yu, director of Tai Chi Health, Madison, WI. “You focus on what you are doing at the time, with a peaceful, accepting perspective. It’s about coming into the present moment.”

Some quotes from older adults who learned Tai Chi from Master Yang Yang:

“To learn something when you are in your late 70s that you can use for however long you happen to live...what greater gift could you expect?”

“I feel more upbeat... more optimistic... I’m more hopeful. I upped my lifespan from 80 to 100. How’s that?!”

“When I talk to people, I say, I’ve started Tai Chi, and it’s changed my life.”

**TIP:**

Here is a resource where you can purchase a DVD:

Tai Chi for Seniors by Mark Johnson

1-800-497-4244

To find locations of classes near you:

Taoist Tai Chi Society of the USA

2100 Thomasville Road

Tallahassee, Florida 32308-0736

Tel: (850) 224-5438

Until next month,

The Age Sage

Please write to me at: [32 Miller Ave., Portsmouth, NH 03801 or call at 1-888-359-2435 or email at: theagesage@extended-family.net](mailto:theagesage@extended-family.net)

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