



## Rethinking the Fountain of Youth

Scientists continue trying to unlock the mysteries of aging with an ancient Chinese practice

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Let's face it; everyone would like to prevent the effects of aging. Today's consumer market is bombarded with pills, creams, lotions, and potions to help regain youth. But what if the answer lies in what you do for your body – not what you put on it? Could improving agility, reducing stress, and increasing vitality and well- end your search for the proverbial fountain of youth? It's quite possible with Tai Chi Chuan, a rejuvenating form of exercise that strengthens the mind, body, and soul.

### What is Tai Chi Chuan?

Tai Chi Chuan, commonly referred to as Tai Chi, has evolved from the rich cultural heritage of China. While different forms of Tai Chi exist, the most popular form, associated with slow, gentle, fluid movements, is Yang style. This graceful method originated in the early 19th century, when Yang Lu-Chan created a soft, meditative practice evolved from the standard, more vigorous forms of Tai Chi. It is this approach, Yang style, which is associated with a multitude of health benefits.

### What is the foundation of Tai Chi?

Tai Chi originated like other martial arts and traditional Chinese Medicine – from the philosophy of Taoism. According to this thinking, everything is composed of polar opposites, *yin and yang*, which work to create continual balance and harmony. Tai Chi consists of exercise equally balanced to harmonize the mind and body – resulting in physical vitality, tranquility, and peacefulness of mind.

### What are the benefits of Tai Chi?

Research studies show that Tai Chi benefits muscle strength and body flexibility, while improving stability. In addition, studies show that Tai Chi reduces blood pressure, increases agility, decreases bone loss, and has great benefits on the mind-body connection – creating greater peace and relaxation.

In addition, Tai Chi aids in the flow of Chi or Qi – a life energy, which comes from the air you breath, the essential Qi from your kidneys, and the Qi you absorb from food and water through your digestive system. Chinese as well as most eastern cultures consider the circulation of Qi throughout your body to be beneficial in performing many functions maintain proper health.

According to Mei-Kuei Chan Cruise, Associate faculty in the Dance Department at Arizona State University who has been practicing and teaching Tai Chi Chuan for more than 30 years, "Practicing Tai Chi Chuan reduces stress, increases and circulates energy or Qi, and cultivates one's ability to be calm and think clearly." She adds, "Circulating your Qi can help remove blockages of energy in the body which in turn reduces pain and illness."

### Can anyone do Tai Chi?

Tai Chi can be a great form of exercise and relaxation for old and young alike. And



because Tai Chi requires no equipment, it can be done anywhere, is composed of simple movements, and can be incorporated into one's daily life quite easily.

### **How can I get started?**

It is easy to get started. There are many avenues to learn Tai Chi – videos, classes, dance studios, books, and more.

"Observe some classes first and find an instructor you feel comfortable with. Try to get some personal instruction from your Tai Chi instructor and use a video, one made by instructor if available, as a tool for review," suggests Mei-Keui Chan Cruise.

Tai Chi is poised to become one of the most popular non-stress forms of exercise. It requires no equipment, can be done anywhere, is for all ages, and is fun and relaxing. In addition, this rejuvenating, strengthening practice benefits the whole person – mind, body, and spirit. It may be just be the obtainable fountain of youth you've been looking for!

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