Ease Arthritis Pain With Tai Chi

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Tai chi relieves arthritis pain in patients and helps them improve their reach, balance and overall well-being, according to a study presented at the annual scientific meeting of the American College of Rheumatology in Atlanta and conducted by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine.

For the eight-week study, which was part of the Arthritis Foundation's tai chi program, researchers recruited 354 participants, ages 18 and up, with any form of self-reported or medically diagnosed arthritis from 20 sites in New York and New Jersey. The participants were randomly placed into two groups: one immediately taught tai chi twice weekly, and a delayed control group that engaged in the course after the others completed the martial arts program and had their results assessed.

Scientists evaluated both groups before and after the study and collected participants' self-reports on pain, fatigue and stiffness. In addition, researchers took physical function performance measures at the study's start and at the end of the eight-week evaluation period. (Performance measures included timed chair stands to gauge lower-body strength, normal and fast gait speed, and balance determinations using a single-leg stance and reach test.)

At the end of the eight weeks, researchers found that people who initially participated in the tai chi program showed moderate improvements in pain, fatigue and stiffness. They also had an increased feeling of overall well-being, including improved balance or reach.

"Our study shows that there are significant benefits of the tai chi course for individuals with all types of arthritis, including fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis," said Leigh Callahan, PhD, the study's lead author. "We found this in both rural and urban settings across a southeastern state and a northeastern state."

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