

Tai chi is beneficial for older adults

By Andrew Loscutoff
Correspondent

Tai chi is a form of exercise transcending many generations as a martial art, meditation, and choreography of movement, which has many pronounced effects on the body. Now, thanks to a better understanding of neurological processes through exercise and movement, tai chi stands as an exercise modality that anyone can enjoy and gain exceptional results.

While its origins are uncertain, it's speculated that tai chi has been practiced for at least 700 years. Originating in ancient China, modern tai chi follows a pattern of movements in a meditative, controlled, and precise fashion. It's also referred to as "movement meditation." This integrates a strong mind-body connection with movement and foci on relaxation, coordination, and helps someone overcome a clouded or convoluted headspace by asking them to focus on solely the movement and breathing associated.

Tai chi can be an effective exercise program for

older adults who might not be suited to the contemporary exercise programs many gyms offer as classes. The gentle movements are easy on the joints, they require no equipment, and provide a wide variety of benefits to many bodily systems.

The mindfulness, relaxation, and the restorative nature of tai chi is backed by ample research showing its brain-boosting benefit. A recent study from Massachusetts General Hospital used eight weeks of meditative practice coupled with MRI exams to look at how it affected the brain. Comparisons of the before-and-after imaging revealed stark adaptations. The gray-matter density improved in the hippocampus, showing better learning and memory formation. Also the amygdala, which when overstimulated can cause anxiety and powerful stress responses, was decreased.

Tai chi can also be a pain-relief strategy for those with low-level chronic pain. Examples of low-level chronic pain are low back pain, arthritis, and the aches

and pains many experience in day-to-day life. The controlled breathing, relaxed movement, and mobility requirements can promote the pain transponders to reset and relax. Think of it like adjusting the knob on those old televisions to get a clearer picture. The restorative movement in tai chi establishes a more clear relationship between body and mind, reducing pain, and promoting a less-tense, more-relaxed body.

Restoring the body to a relaxed state can also help relieve hypertensive states, inflammation, and cortisol stress hormones. Chronic stress may be the most dangerous thing to our body, and if no intervention is taken, it can fester into heart disease, strokes, obesity, fatigue, etc. (See related story, page 14.)

Tai chi is an excellent way to combat these effects, without pharmaceuticals or psychotherapy, by up-regulating the function of the parasympathetic nervous systems and hampering the sympathetic system, which is often overactive in stressful times.

Movement patterns which

cross the centerline, and use coordination, are effective in older adults because of the left-brain-right-brain connections. As one moves a limb from one side to another, the brain needs to process these movements. This complexity stimulates areas which otherwise wouldn't be used. It can be effective for problem-solving, balance, coordination, and cognition.

Moving one's body through a full range of motion, using many joints and muscles is a great approach to staying mobile and functional.

Tai chi uses coordinated movement patterns, full ranges of motion, restorative and meditative practice, all of which provide many benefits. Those who are not currently exercising, need some mind-body work, or just desire to change their fitness program up can benefit from Tai chi. Look for a beginner-friendly, experienced leader, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Check out different styles, and try different techniques. The body, mind, and spirit will be happy!

Nutrition education volunteers needed

Concerned about the food choices people are making that affect their health?

If you would enjoy sharing research-based information about healthy eating on a budget then consider becoming an Oregon State University nutrition education volunteer. Volunteers demonstrate cooking healthy recipes at local food pantries or lead small groups with interactive nutrition activities.

To become a volunteer, applicants take a five-hour class on Wed., Oct. 18, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the OSU/Deschutes County Extension Office in Redmond. Once trained and certified, volunteers commit to demonstrating healthy recipes six times in six months.

Visit <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes/nutrition-education> to apply. For more information call 541-306-6067.



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"I may be most proud of the instances in which I have found a disease state in a patient that required advanced care. One patient did not respond to treatment as he typically did after cutting firewood, which goaded me to order films. He had advanced prostate cancer, which was referring pain to his low back. Because of my knowledge of his usual recovery and ensuing suitable treatment with an oncologist, he lived a long, healthy life."

Dr. Malone is also grateful for the healthcare now available in Sisters. "Once I was the only physician in town. A physical therapy clinic was the only other healthcare provider here. We are privileged



to have such a cross-section of quality care in all forms."

LOW-COST DOG & CAT Vaccination & Microchip Clinic

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10 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

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Protect your beloved dog or cat at a low-cost vaccination clinic at Sisters Feed & Supply on Saturday, October 20, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Keri Lynne McDowell's mobile Sunshine Veterinary Service will be on hand to provide free exams and provide the full range of vaccinations for your pet — including rabies, distemper, kennel cough, etc.

This community service has been an annual event hosted by Sisters Feed since 2009. Expect it to take about a half-hour to fill out paperwork, talk to the vet, and get the shots taken care of.

Sunshine Veterinary Services also offers house calls. Keri Lynn McDowell can be reached at 541-699-9149.

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headquarters for everything from pet food and toys to your farm-and-ranch needs. Stop by and talk with the knowledgeable staff about any of your needs — from dogs to horses to chickens!