

# Tai chi

## Staying healthy in body and mind

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

There's no need to travel half-way around the world to enjoy the benefits of tai chi, an ancient Chinese martial art.

Tai chi has been gaining in popularity among Grant County residents over the past few years.

A free class with instructor Crish Hamilton is available at the Prairie City Senior Center, 204 N. McHaley St., each Wednesday, starting after the center's 12-1 p.m. luncheon.

Tai chi is a low-impact exercise, making it a good fit for all ages and abilities, even people in a wheelchair.

Experts say the exercise may help improve balance and reduce back pain and pain from osteoarthritis. It can also improve conditions for those with heart disease, cancer and other chronic illnesses.

Although there is a low risk of injury with tai chi, checking with a doctor is recommended.

Crish Hamilton, a Mt. Vernon resident, said the eight-form (yang style) tai chi she teaches can help seniors achieve better balance, but the benefits don't stop there.

"There's much more to be gained than just balance, including improved memory, muscle tone, bone density and general health," she said.

Another positive is the social aspect of being involved in the group.

Hamilton also teaches two classes at the John Day Senior Center, 142 NE Dayton St., at 12:30 p.m. on Mondays and 10:15 a.m. on Thursdays. The classes are free to the community,

funded by Blue Mountain Hospital.

She previously taught yoga for 20 years, and at age 55, she was a world-champion deadlift weightlifter.

"I discovered you're never too old to achieve some form of fitness," she said.

The moves for the type of tai chi Hamilton teaches involve flowing motions to the left and right with breathing to give energy to the movements, "not like hoeing in the garden," she said, adding the instruction is individualized for each person.

One of her students, Karen Corwin of Prairie City, attends all three tai chi classes each week.

"It's a confidence builder in your ability to exercise," she said. "I enjoy that it's a gentle way to get the body moving."

Corwin said her sister, who lives in central Oregon, pays to take these types of classes.

Hamilton said she usually has six to 10 people in her Prairie City class and nine to 10 in John Day. One student travels from Dayville to John Day to take part.


"Several people told me their balance has improved," Hamilton said, adding that one person told her their leg injury has improved since participating.

Tai chi can be done while sitting in a chair, standing while holding a chair or just standing.

Hamilton said the body can "freeze up" with age and less activity, but the good news is that adding movement, such as tai chi, can reverse that.

"It's a fun class to teach," she said. "It's low pressure and doable for everybody."

For more information, call Prairie City Senior Center at 541-820-4100 or John Day Senior Center 541-575-1825.



Tai chi instructor Crish Hamilton leads a class at the Prairie City Senior Center.