

Can Tai Chi Really Be Easy?



Introducing Tai Chi Easy™

Roughly 100 million people in China practice Tai Chi or QiGong daily. If you've seen the movie *The Intern*, you saw Anne Hathaway's and Robert DeNiro's characters practicing Tai Chi in the park. Tai Chi Easy (TCE) is rooted in Chinese medicine. Qi (or Chi, both pronounced *chee*)—loosely translated and greatly simplified—is a primary force that creates and sustains life, or life energy if you will. Then there's QiGong (pronounced *chee gung*), which is the art of cultivating and harmonizing this life force by using movement, breathing, massage, and meditation. A sub-type of QiGong, Tai Chi involves purposeful movements (originally from martial arts) done in a very slow, flowing sequence in order to calm and relax both mind and body.

So how is Tai Chi Easy any different from regular Tai Chi (or QiGong)?

First, TCE is actually a combination of several methods proven to increase the innate healing abilities of the human body¹:

- Postural alignment and gentle movement
- Breathing
- Self massage
- Relaxation, visualization, and meditation

Second, traditional Tai Chi consists of 108 movements—which take **years** to learn and perfect. Even the short forms include 24, 36, or 42 movements. TCE can be done in two to five movements, adding more as learners progress. Now just because there are only a few movements, that doesn't mean it's not effective! The goal is to get the body into the parasympathetic state of the "relaxation response" (the opposite of the sympathetic stress state of "fight or flight"). Getting the body into this relaxed state allows the nervous system to calm down, slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure, engages the digestive system, increases lymphatic flow and stimulates the immune system, quiets the mind, and reduces both physical and emotional stress. Sounds good, doesn't it? But all this only happens if you actually **DO** the practice. Traditional Tai Chi can be frustrating because it takes a lot of time

¹ Tai Chi Easy™ Practice Leader Training Guide, Roger Jahnke, OMD, ©2016 Santa Barbara, CA

² National Institutes of Health

and determination to learn all the movement sequences—and who has time for that? This is supposed to be relaxing, not taxing. So Dr. Roger Jahnke, of the Institute of Integral QiGong and Tai Chi, created the "Easy" method. He designed TCE to be enjoyable and easy to perform, easy to remember, and easy to modify to your own body's needs.

Health Benefits of Tai Chi Easy¹

Practicing TCE triggers key physiological and psychological health benefits including

- Stress Relief – induces a relaxed, meditative state of mind that helps relieve stress
- Improved Balance – emphasis on good posture and shifting of weight from foot to foot improves balance
- Heart Health – lowers heart rate and blood pressure and increases circulation by dilating the blood vessels
- Immune System Boost – gets lymph flowing, eliminating waste and toxins and carrying specialized immune cells to fight disease
- Mental Focus – calms your mind by slowing down brain wave patterns and improves focus and attention

If you're into randomized control trials and scientific "stuff," find numerous research studies on the health benefits of Tai Chi/QiGong at http://www.instituteofintegralqigongandTaiChi.org/qigong_tai_chi_research/. In addition, Dr. Jahnke's organization recently received a \$3 million NIH² grant to study the effects of Tai Chi Easy and QiGong on fatigue in breast cancer survivors. This study is a collaboration between the Institute of Integral QiGong and Tai Chi (Dr. Jahnke), the Mayo Clinic, and Arizona State University.

What is a Tai Chi Easy practice session like?

During a session, the leader will remind you to do the following key principles of TCE:

1. Do the practices as best you can. It's not a contest with yourself or anyone else. Deep relaxing breaths, gently moving the body, or doing self-massage will activate the



body's self-healing capabilities. So don't worry if you're not doing it "right"; whatever you're doing is far better than doing nothing!

2. Stay in your personal comfort zone and adapt or modify the movements as necessary to fit your body's needs. There should be no pain or discomfort, and TCE can be done standing, sitting, or even lying in a hospital bed.

3. Maintain the "three intentful corrections": focus on body movement, breath, and mind (explained below).

Then you can expect to practice

Gentle, slow movements while maintaining a focus on correct posture and balance. All movements are done by following the leader, with multiple repetitions so that everyone can follow along at their own pace and within their comfort level. It's not a lot of hard-to-follow dance steps. The actual Tai Chi movements do require concentration because the arms and legs may be moving in different directions—but this is good; it keeps the brain busy concentrating in a meditative-like state (making it tough for the "monkey brain" to worry about the shopping list or having to run around picking up the kids).

Breath work. Abdominal (diaphragmatic) breathing is taught along with other breathing methods/techniques for improved body oxygenation, stress reduction, and improved sleep.

Self-massage. Tips and techniques on self-massage of the ears, hands, feet, neck, face, abdomen, joints, etc. will be

shown and described in a way that won't wear you out while doing it. Did you know that by massaging specific points on the hands, feet, and ears, you can help heal any part of the body or internal organ? (It's called reflexology in the West.)

Meditation. A separate guided meditation may or may not be done in each session because by doing the focused movements, proper deep breathing and self-massage, you'll most likely get into a meditative state for at least part of the time. Clearing the mind with visualization, affirmations, guided imagery, or focused mindfulness may all be included in a session.

All of this gets your body out of the "fight or flight" mode of sympathetic nervous system dominance and switches it over to "rest and digest" or the "relaxation response" where the parasympathetic nervous system takes over. This allows your body's "healer within" (i.e. the immune system) to start working more effectively. Best of all, the practice is fun, easy, social, very affordable, and can be done daily at home for free!

Martha Lindeman is a Certified Acupuncturist and Tai Chi Easy™ Practice Leader, as well as a Licensed Massage Therapist. She is the owner of For Your Health, LLC, located at 133 West Central Street in downtown Chippewa Falls. She offers drop-in classes, a series of 8 to 12 individual or group sessions, as well as corporate wellness programs. View the current TCE class schedule at yourhealthmassage.com or contact Martha directly at fyhmassage@hotmail.com or 715.226.0896.



October is breast cancer awareness month. It's the perfect time to indulge, have a latte with a friend and catch up on things. *Like scheduling your mammograms.*

When breast cancer is detected early, and is in the localized stage, the 5-year relative survival rate is 100 percent.*

Call 715.717.4151 (*Sacred Heart*) **or 715.717.7600** (*St. Joseph's*) **to schedule your mammogram today.** And find helpful breast cancer prevention and treatment information at SacredHeartEauClaire.org or StJoesChipfalls.com

*source: <http://www.nationalbreastcancer.org/about-breast-cancer>

