

Study: Chinese exercises good for seniors

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University of Illinois scientists say they have confirmed previous studies, finding ancient Chinese exercises such as tai chi are good for older adults.

The researchers say such exercises combine simple, graceful movements and meditation into a series of integrated exercises believed to have positive, relaxing effects on a person's mind, body and spirit.

Visiting kinesiology Professor Yang Yang said such exercises are relatively simple, safe and inexpensive, requiring no special equipment. That, he said, makes them easily adaptable for practice by healthy senior citizens.

In two studies -- one quantitative, one qualitative -- Illinois researchers led by Yang found healthy seniors who practiced such exercises three times a week for six months experienced significant physical benefits after only two months.

Participants demonstrated noticeable improvements in laboratory-controlled tests designed to measure balance, lower body strength and stance width, a subset of participants providing evidence of how tai chi practice also enhanced their lives from mental, emotional and spiritual perspectives. Other evidence pointed to improvements in sleep quality, concentration, memory, self-esteem and overall energy levels.

The study was presented in May, during the North American Research Conference on Complementary and Integrative Medicine in Edmonton,

Alberta, Canada.

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