

Tai Chi and Qigong Show Significant Health Benefits

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An across-the-board review of the health effects of Qigong and Tai Chi finds these practices offer many physical and mental health advantages with benefits for the heart, immune system and overall quality of life.

The review, which appears in the July/August issue of the [American Journal of Health Promotion](#), included 77 randomized controlled trials (RCTs) on Qigong or Tai Chi interventions published in peer-reviewed journals between 1993 and 2007. Taken together, there were 6,410 participants in the studies.

“We see this as moving the understanding of the potential of Qigong and Tai Chi forward, with an emphasis on combining the evidence across these practices,” said co-author Linda Larkey, Ph.D., of Arizona State University College of Nursing and Healthcare Innovation.

The authors say that the review provides a “stronger evidence base” for bone health, cardio-respiratory fitness, physical function, balance, quality of life, fall prevention and psychological benefits.

Qigong is a “very general term to describe exercises that will enhance qi flow or balance,” said Shin Lin, Ph.D., a professor at the Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of California, Irvine. Qigong combines “qi” for energy and “gong” for work or exercise.

Tai Chi is much more specific, focusing on a series of 24 to 108 movements that have a long written history over 19 generations, said

Lin, a member of the National Advisory Council for Complimentary and Alterative Medicine

“The research studies reviewed here showed that simplified routines that are more practical for RCTs are in fact quite effective in health enhancement.” With that in mind, individuals could “forego learning complicated routines except for cultural or artistic purposes,” said Lin, who had no affiliation with the review.

Of the studies analyzed 27 considered psychological symptoms, 23 looked at falls and related risk factors, 19 looked at cardiopulmonary effects and 17 evaluated quality of life. Other included studies looked at bone density, physical function and immune function. Participants’ average age was 55, and for studies that looked at balance, 80 was the average age.

Larkey said that there was not a way to “combine the studies statistically and determine effect sizes - that is, how strong the evidence is - for many of the outcomes reviewed since the interventions, study design quality and measures were so wide ranging.”

Nevertheless, she said, the authors found quite consistent evidence of several benefits from this particular category of exercise.

“[Tai Chi](#) and Qigong have many health benefits and therefore should be considered a high priority when one is selecting an exercise to practice,” Lin said.

More information: Jahnke R, et al. A comprehensive review of health benefits of Qigong and Tai Chi. Am J Health Promot 24(6), 2010.

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