

Tai chi helps prevent falls and improve mental health in the elderly

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Tai chi has particular health benefits for older people, including helping to prevent falls and improving mental wellbeing, reveals a review published ahead of print in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

But the Chinese martial art widely practised for its health benefits does not help improve the symptoms of cancer or [rheumatoid arthritis](#) and the evidence is contradictory for many other health conditions and symptoms.

The effectiveness of t'ai chi for a variety of medical conditions and symptoms has been assessed in several studies and reviews, but their findings have been contradictory, so researchers from Korea Institute of Oriental Medicine in South Korea and the University of Exeter in the UK decided to compare the conclusions of these reviews to gain a better understanding of the benefits of t'ai chi.

Thirty five relevant reviews assessing t'ai chi were identified from English, Chinese and Korean databases. They looked at the effectiveness of the technique in a variety of disease areas, including cancer, [Parkinson's disease](#), musculoskeletal pain, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, osteoporosis and type 2 diabetes. Some reviews also assessed the benefits of t'ai chi for psychological health, balance and [fall prevention](#), muscle strength and flexibility and improving [aerobic capacity](#).

For several conditions, the findings of the reviews were contradictory.

However, there was relatively clear evidence that t'ai chi is effective for fall prevention and improving psychological health and was associated with general health benefits for older people. On the other hand, t'ai chi seemed to be ineffective for the symptomatic treatment of cancer and rheumatoid arthritis.

The authors conclude: "Our overview showed that t'ai chi, which combines deep breathing and relaxation with slow and gentle movements, may exert exercise-based general benefits for fall prevention and improvement of balance in older people as well as some meditative effects for improving [psychological health](#). We recommend t'ai chi for older people for its various physical and psychological benefits. However, t'ai chi may not effectively treat inflammatory diseases. "

Provided by British Medical Journal

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