

# Tai Chi improves pain and well-being in patients with knee osteoarthritis

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Tai Chi improves pain and related health outcomes in patients with knee osteoarthritis as well as standard physical therapy, according to a comparative effectiveness trial published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Tai Chi was also shown to produce significantly greater improvements in depression and the physical component of quality of life.

Knee osteoarthritis is a leading cause of age-related [pain](#) and disability. Over-the-counter pain medications often fail to relieve symptoms and are associated with serious adverse effects. Physical therapy is globally recommended, but benefits are modest. As such, identifying new and effective treatments is an urgent clinical and public health priority. Tai Chi, a multicomponent traditional Chinese mind-body practice that combines meditation with slow, gentle, graceful movements; deep breathing; and relaxation, has been shown to alleviate symptoms of knee osteoarthritis, but no trials have directly compared Tai Chi with standard care.

Researchers sought to compare Tai Chi with standard [physical therapy](#) for relieving pain, physical function, depression, medication use, and quality of life in patients with knee osteoarthritis. Just over 200 participants were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups: Tai Chi or standard physical therapy. Patients in the Tai Chi group performed Tai Chi with a trained instructor 2 times per week for 12 weeks. Patients in the physical therapy group had standard physical therapy 2 times per week for 6 weeks, followed by 6 weeks of monitored home exercise.

After 12 weeks, patients in both groups showed significant improvements in pain as measured by the Western Ontario and McMaster Universities Osteoarthritis Index (WOMAC) score, with benefits maintained up to 52 weeks. In addition, patients in the Tai Chi group had significantly greater improvements in well-being compared to those in the physical therapy group. According to the authors, these findings support Tai Chi as an effective therapeutic option for [knee osteoarthritis](#).

**More information:** *Annals of Internal Medicine*,  
[www.annals.org/article.aspx?doi=10.7326/M15-2143](http://www.annals.org/article.aspx?doi=10.7326/M15-2143)

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