

Tai Chi proves feasible and beneficial for vets with PTSD

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Veterans with symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who participated in in Tai Chi not only would recommend it to a friend, but also found the ancient Chinese tradition helped with their symptoms including managing intrusive thoughts, difficulties with concentration and physiological arousal.

The findings, which appear in the journal *BMJ Open*, are the first to examine feasibility, qualitative feedback and satisfaction associated with Tai Chi for this population.

In the general population, the lifetime risk of developing PTSD is estimated to be 8.7 percent. Among Veterans seeking VA services the risk is higher, with an estimate of 23.1 percent. PTSD and its [symptoms](#) often become chronic and are associated with a loss of physical, financial and psychological well-being.

Tai Chi is practiced today as a graceful form of exercise that involves a series of movements performed in a slow, focused manner accompanied by deep breathing and mindfulness. In addition to physical improvements in flexibility, strength and pain management, there is evidence that Tai Chi improves sleep and reduces depression and anger.

Seventeen Veterans with posttraumatic stress symptoms enrolled in a four-session introduction to Tai Chi program. After the final session, participants reported favorable impressions of the program. Nearly 94 percent were very or mostly satisfied and all participants indicated that

they would like to participate in future Tai Chi programs and would recommend it to a friend. In addition, they described feeling very engaged during the sessions and found Tai Chi to be helpful for managing distressing PTSD symptoms.

According to the researchers this study provides evidence for the feasibility of enrolling and engaging Veterans with symptoms of PTSD in a Tai Chi exercise program. "Our findings also indicate that Tai Chi is a safe physical activity and appropriate for individuals with varying physical capabilities. Given our positive findings, additional research is needed to empirically evaluate Tai Chi as a treatment for symptoms of PTSD," said Barbara Niles, PhD, assistant professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine and staff research psychologist at the National Center for PTSD - Behavioral Science Division, VA Boston Healthcare System.

More information: Barbara L Niles et al, Feasibility, qualitative findings and satisfaction of a brief Tai Chi mind–body programme for veterans with post-traumatic stress symptoms, *BMJ Open* (2016). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-012464](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-012464)

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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