

Can T'ai Chi alleviate chronic low back pain in older adults?

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A new study evaluated the feasibility and acceptability of using T'ai Chi

to improve chronic low back pain in adults over 65 years of age compared to health education and usual care. The results of this randomized controlled trial are published in *JACM*, the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*.

T'ai Chi has been shown effective for improving [chronic back pain](#) yet with little attention to older adults. For this study researchers Karen Sherman, Ph.D. and colleagues from Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute and University of Washington, Seattle, focused only on adults older than 65. They present their [study design](#) and findings in the article entitled "T'ai Chi for Chronic Low Back Pain in Older Adults: A Feasibility Trial."

Participants were randomly assigned to 12 weeks of T'ai Chi, a 12-week health education intervention, or usual care. Measures of recruitment and retention contributed to the determination of feasibility. The findings indicate that the study was feasible and had acceptable recruitment, few dropouts, and an excellent safety profile. Among the T'ai Chi participants, 62% attended at least 70% of the classes during the 12-week intervention period. Remarkably, at 52 weeks, 70% of T'ai Chi participants reported having practiced the week before, with a median of 3 days per week and 15 minutes/session. Both participation and perception of helpfulness were lower in the [health education](#) group.

"More research is needed on treatments for [chronic low back pain](#) in older adults," Dr. Sherman summarizes. "Our study showed that it's feasible to do a clinical trial of T'ai Chi for this condition."

JACM Editor-in-Chief John Weeks, johnweeks-integrator.com, Seattle, WA, states: "Many of us have become familiar with pictures of large groups of older people in China or Hong Kong practicing T'ai Chi together. Dr. Sherman's work suggests that [older adults](#) here in the United States may similarly find such practices acceptable and useful."

More information: Karen J. Sherman et al, T'ai Chi for Chronic Low Back Pain in Older Adults: A Feasibility Trial, *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1089/acm.2019.0438](https://doi.org/10.1089/acm.2019.0438)

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