

# An ancient solution for a modern problem

Today's busy world is full of stress and distractions. It's not easy to find time to exercise. It's no easier to find quiet periods to sort out your priorities. And how many of us can say we have a stress-free life?

There are no miracle cures but the ancient Chinese art of Tai Chi can help in many ways.

## What is Tai Chi?



Ta'i Chi Ch'uan (Tai Chi for short) is a Chinese martial art that has been practiced and developed for many centuries. Its roots are in traditional Chinese medicine and Taoism that date back to 500BC. The art of Tai Chi can be traced back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the modern form has been documented and refined over the past 250 years.

The practice of Tai Chi combines slow, flowing movements with static meditation to improve health and well-being. But do not be deceived by the apparent gentleness of the movements – Tai Chi is more than just “directing imaginary traffic in the park”. Underlying the slow and controlled movements is an effective martial art. Everything is learned and performed slowly to ensure good technique; once the right technique becomes automatic, it is then easy to speed it up for cardiovascular benefits and for self-defence applications.

## Health benefits

The movements of Tai Chi emphasise posture, control and body awareness. This provides gentle but effective exercise for the whole body. By focussing on body position and weight distribution, you will improve your balance and core strength.

Correct and controlled breathing is also central to Tai Chi practice. Deep and slow breaths improve oxygen take-up and increase relaxation.

There is growing evidence of the benefits of Tai Chi regardless of age or fitness level (1)

## Stress relief

Most of us don't live our lives in an oasis of calm. Between planning for the future and picking over past events, it's easy to forget to live in the present moment.

All the movements in Tai Chi are performed with full concentration and focus. This takes you away from thoughts of past and future so that you can start properly experiencing the here-and-now. You can take a step back from negative or distracting thoughts and start getting things into perspective.

Add to this the gentle movements and controlled breathing and you will find regular practice will aid relaxation, reduce stress and improve concentration.

If any of this appeals to you, why not give Tai Chi a go? There are plenty of classes around so there should be one within reach.

*Take the first steps now to better health, reduced stress and improved well-being.*

(1) [http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard\\_Womens\\_Health\\_Watch/2009/May/The-health-benefits-of-tai-chi](http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletters/Harvard_Womens_Health_Watch/2009/May/The-health-benefits-of-tai-chi)