

How Tai Chi Boosts Health

Consumer Reports

One plus appears to be [better balance](#). A recent analysis of 10 studies involving older adults, in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, found that regular classes [reduced falls](#) by 43 percent in those followed for up to a year compared with other exercise. One study suggested it may also [cut the chance of being injured in a fall](#) by half.

Tai chi involves slowly shifting your weight from side to side or forward and back, and stepping in circles, all of which [improve balance](#).

“It also helps strengthen your stabilizing muscles, like those in the hips, and improves your body’s sense of where it is in space,” says Linda Larkey, Ph.D., a professor in the College of Nursing and Health Innovation at Arizona State University.

A review published last year in Canadian Family Physician found that tai chi also helps ease the symptoms of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, dementia, depression, osteoarthritis, and Parkinson’s disease. A similar review found it may help with hypertension, too.

“The mindfulness aspect of tai chi—the breathing, focus, and rhythmic nature of the movements—helps calm the nervous system and reduce inflammation,” Larkey says. That can have a positive effect on [brain function](#), [pain perception](#), anxiety, and blood pressure, she notes.

Qi Gong

Like tai chi, qi gong is an ancient mind-body practice that uses a variety of postures, movements, breathing techniques, and sound to improve mental focus and promote health. A 2015 Cochrane review hinted that qi gong might help lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, though more study is needed. Other research suggests that it can help people with fibromyalgia and other pain conditions.