



# Painting the Rainbow Newsletter

<http://www.paintingtherainbow.co.uk>

## Community Based Tai Chi & Chi-Kung for everyone

*Improvement cannot always be measured, it is something you feel*

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### Tai Chi: Antidote to Life's Pressures

Life is full of experiences and some of those turn into pressures and cause problems we never foresaw, sometimes preventing us from moving forward and enjoying life as we should.

Tai Chi is a great way to counter a variety of problems/obstacles such as those relating to anxiety, maybe anger, all causing us mental stress; often, if not recognized can be the start of related physical illnesses i.e. gastric problems. Stress is one of the known accentuations of arthritic flare ups, depression, IBS, and many more I am sure you have heard about.

I regularly have conversations with people who attend weekly classes and hear of wonderful accounts of how Tai Chi has improved their quality of life. The most benefits are gained if you can integrate it into your daily routines. Remember at times when your day starts to make you feel pressured, step back, take a few deep breathes, regain that calm feeling you achieve in your weekly class. A calm mind enables rational thinking and helps finding solutions to problems easier.

Life is so fast paced, time is lost or utilized badly and sadly, the time to relax is especially when we feel we don't have time to do it.

It is always going to be a question of prioritising, organization, and the ability to make decisions in an informed way.

This in turn means the ability to "live in the moment". A term that is used frequently in the media, easy to say, harder to do.

Many people over the years have said to Mark that they attend Tai Chi classes for just that "moment" The students can, for that hour focus on clearing their mind of routine everyday stresses and focus on relaxation and the form; hopefully going home refreshed and feeling regenerated.

At first sight, the 37-movement form can appear quite daunting to some with so much to remember and do i.e. correct foot and hand movement and positioning, correct body alignment, correct rhythm/speed and of course relaxed breathing.

When I started attending the Painting the Rainbow Tai Chi sessions, I made the mistake of being in a rush (impatient) to learn the form. It was only when I relaxed, slowed down, and concentrated on one movement at a time and "lived in the moment", that I began to make progress. In time those motions began to blend into one continuous motion and then came a feeling of inner peace, well being, and a sense of being in tune with nature (feeling free, no longer having to think)

Improvement/progress is gradual, but also a most rewarding on-going process with many of the lessons that I learn from Tai Chi efficiently transferring over into my everyday life.

Being "present in the moment" means what you are doing at that very moment, must be precisely what you are doing at that very moment and not anything else. This requires letting go of thoughts of the past, and concerns for the future.

The simplest of pleasures can curb needless haste. That's what Tai Chi can be if you are prepared to take some "time-out" for yourself, a pleasure, not simple but well worth the journey.

By Peter Jagger

### The health benefits of tai chi

This gentle form of exercise can help maintain strength, flexibility, and balance, and could be the perfect activity for the rest of your life.

Tai chi is often described as "meditation in motion," but it might well be called "medication in motion." There is growing evidence that this mind-body practice, which originated in China as a martial art, has value in treating or preventing many health problems. Moreover, you can get started even if you are not in top shape or the best of health.

In this low-impact, slow-motion exercise, you go without pausing through a series of motions named for animal actions — for example, "white crane spreads its wings" — or martial arts moves, such as "deflect down, parry and punch." As you move, you breathe deeply and naturally, focusing your attention — as in some kinds of meditation — on your bodily sensations. Tai chi differs from other types of exercise in several respects. The movements are usually circular and never forced, the muscles are relaxed rather than tensed, the joints are not fully extended or bent, and connective tissues are not stretched. Tai chi can be easily adapted for anyone, from the most fit to people confined to wheelchairs or recovering from surgery.



“A growing body of carefully conducted research is building a compelling case for tai chi as an adjunct to standard medical treatment for the prevention and rehabilitation of many conditions commonly associated with age,” says Peter M. Wayne, assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. An adjunct therapy is one that’s used together with primary medical treatments, either to address a disease itself or its primary symptoms, or, more generally, to improve a patient’s functioning and quality of life.

### Our tai chi class include:

**Warm-up.** Easy motions, to help you to loosen your muscles and joints and focus on your balance, breath and body.

**Qigong (or chi-kung).** Translated as “breath work” or “energy work,” this consists of of gentle breathing sometimes often combined with movement such as the shibashi set (18 exercises for health). The idea is to help relax the mind and mobilise the body’s energy. Qigong may be practiced standing, sitting, or lying down.

**Instruction and practice of tai chi forms.** Short forms — forms are sets of movements — may include a dozen or so movements; long forms may include hundreds. Different styles require smaller or larger movements. A short form with smaller, slower movements is usually recommended at the beginning, especially if you’re not as agile or not in good condition.

### Getting started

The benefits of tai chi are generally greatest if you begin before you develop a chronic illness or functional limitations. Tai chi is very safe, and no fancy equipment is needed, so it's easy to get started. Here's some advice for doing so:

Don't be intimidated by the language. Names like Yang, Wu, and Cheng are given to various branches of tai chi, in honor of people who devised the sets of movements called forms. Certain programs emphasize the martial arts aspect of tai chi rather than its potential for healing and stress reduction. In some forms, you learn long sequences of movements, while others involve shorter series and more focus on breathing and meditation. The name is less important than finding an approach that matches your interests and needs.

**Check with your doctor.** If you have a limiting musculoskeletal problem or medical condition — or if you take medications that can make you dizzy or lightheaded — check with your doctor before starting tai chi. Given its excellent safety record, chances are that you'll be encouraged to try it.

Consider observing and taking a class. Taking a class may be the best way to learn tai chi. Seeing a teacher in action, getting feedback, and experiencing the camaraderie of a group are all pluses. Some teachers will let you observe the class first to see if you feel comfortable with the approach and atmosphere.

If you'd rather learn at home, you can buy or rent DVDs geared to your interests and fitness needs and YouTube is a great to. Although there are some excellent tai chi books, it can be difficult to appreciate the flow of movements from still photos or illustrations.

**Dress comfortably.** Choose loose-fitting clothes that don't restrict your range of motion. You can practice barefoot or in lightweight, comfortable, and flexible shoes. Tai chi shoes are available, but we just suggest flat comfortable shoes, light weight trainers or deck shoes. You'll need shoes that won't slip and can provide enough support to help you balance, but have soles thin enough to allow you to feel the ground. Running shoes, designed to propel you forward, are usually unsuitable.

**Gauge your progress.** Most beginning programs and tai chi interventions tested in medical research last at least 12 weeks, with instruction once or twice a week and practice at home. By the end of that time, you should know whether you enjoy tai chi, and you may already notice positive physical and psychological changes.



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### No pain, big gains

Although tai chi is slow and gentle and doesn't leave you breathless, it addresses the key components of fitness — muscle strength, flexibility, balance, and, to a lesser degree, aerobic conditioning. Here's some of the evidence:

**Muscle strength.** Tai chi can improve both lower-body strength and upper-body strength. When practiced regularly, tai chi can be comparable to resistance training and brisk walking.

"Although you aren't working with weights or resistance bands, the unsupported arm exercise involved in tai chi strengthens your upper body," says internist Dr. Gloria Yeh, an assistant professor at Harvard Medical School. "Tai chi strengthens both the lower and upper extremities and also the core muscles of the back and abdomen."

**Flexibility.** Tai chi can boost upper- and lower-body flexibility as well as strength.

**Balance.** Tai chi improves balance and, according to some studies, reduces falls. Proprioception — the ability to sense the position of one's body in space — declines with age. Tai chi helps train this sense, which is a function of sensory neurons in the inner ear and stretch receptors in the muscles and ligaments. Tai chi also improves muscle strength and flexibility, which makes it easier to recover from a stumble. Fear of falling can make you more likely to fall; some studies have found that tai chi training helps reduce that fear.

**Aerobic conditioning.** Depending on the speed and size of the movements, tai chi can provide some aerobic benefits.

### Some of the benefits claimed for tai chi include:

- Better mood, with lower levels of depression, stress, and anxiety.
- Greater aerobic capacity and muscle strength.
- More energy and stamina.
- Enhanced flexibility, balance, and agility.
- Lower blood pressure and improved heart health.
- Reduced Inflammation.
- Fewer falls.

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