



# 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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## We Need You



As more and more people realise how good tai chi can be for them, and in fact how accessible it is, we have come to realise we need more teachers to support the demand.

Maybe you've been thinking of looking into training as a tai chi teacher or even know a friend it would suit ideally. What we are looking for in would-be teachers is a desire to learn and help others. Learning tai chi can be seen as relatively stright forward but teaching and helping others is a skill in itself; do you have it?

We are running a '**Tai Chi for well-being**' course starting in May so now is your chance to take that next step. The course is split into 2-day blocks over the year, as shown below, so please do contact me to discuss this further and even book your place.

- Module 1: May 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup>
- Module 2: June 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup>
- Module 3: September 26<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup>
- Module 4: November 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup>

The course will be held in Kings Norton, Birmingham.

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### Learn tai chi and enjoy the trip

Some years ago a landmark study was published in an American Journal of the Medical Association that showed Tai Chi Chuan to be twice as effective as other exercises in the prevention of falls among the elderly.

This preventative power was thought to be due to the development of better balance. There is a lot of effort in the form spent standing on one leg and shifting weight slowly and purposefully back and forth from one leg to the other.

There are five elements we believe that are contributing factors in balance, these are: eye-sight, (or vision), the vestibular system (or balance organs) within the ear that send messages to the brain about changes in the position of the head, leg strength, awareness of the body's centre of gravity, and proprioception. All of these elements are included in Tai Chi practice in one form or another but it was found you do not need to have all five working perfectly to improve balance using Tai Chi.

So what was the factor found during the study that was thought to influence improvement the most? It was Proprioception. This is the ability of proprioceptors, special receptor cells found in the joints and tendons, muscles and skin, that process information about the body's orientation as it moves through space. Simply put, proprioception is muscle sense.

Dr Oliver Sacks wrote a book entitled "The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat"; in one essay within the book he described a patient who had totally lost her sense of proprioception. She had no

idea of where her body was. If she closed her eyes, she would fall down.

She was able to move her arms and legs only by vigorous use of her eyes, compensating for her loss.

Even then, she did not "feel" her body. Maybe this is why Tai Chi can be so effective for balance because it develops this sense of proprioception.

In the 1890's C.S.Sherrington called it our sixth, but hidden or secret sense. Hidden because "that continuous but unconscious sensory flow from the movable parts of our body (muscles, tendons, and joints), by which their position and tone and motion are continually monitored and adjusted, but in a way which is hidden from us because it is automatic and unconscious".

We had a student who was referred to tai chi for peripheral neuropathy. The damage to his nerves meant he had no sensation in his feet which in turn caused him to fall a great deal. He was referred to help with his relaxation and to hopefully improve his balance. There were two aspects to his problem (1) reduced proprioception (2) the belief that as he couldn't feel the ground as he thought he should he was anxious about falling. This may seem obvious but have you ever worried about slipping on ice, tensed up when walking and caused yourself to fall? We helped with the relaxation quickly so the next and most interesting part was developing muscle sense (feedback) when the feedback system was damaged. My first question was "are you floating off the ground" to which he replied "of course not", "so how do you know?" He though for a moment and came to the realisation that he sensed it elsewhere in his body so our job was to refine that feedback (proprioception). Within just a

few short weeks his confidence grew and his balance improved; in fact his aims shifted from balance to being able to drive his car again and going back to work as a sales rep. Once he had a greater sense of what feedback was through sensory calibration exercises that are an integral part of tai chi – mindful walking, form, push-hands etc – his tai chi and general well-being improved at an amazing rate, and as this refinement moved from conscious effort to the unconscious automatic process it is designed to be he no longer needed to notice. Tai Chi became his tool for refined practice.

An aspect of falls prevention that seems to be regularly overlooked is that falling (due to gravity) is how we actually are able to move; lean forwards, shift your body weight to start movement and catch yourself by getting your leg there in time. Not getting your leg there in time is called tripping or ‘falling over something’. Tai Chi works by stepping out first and sensing the ground before releasing your weight into it rather than releasing your weight and hoping your leg will get there in time to catch you. Both form and push-hands involves moving into balance. Prof Cheng is often quoted as saying “We all have an excellent root you just have to stop resisting gravity”.



To read more about tai chi and falls prevention please visit [www.fallspreventiontraining.co.uk](http://www.fallspreventiontraining.co.uk)

## Beat Alzheimer’s and Dementia With Tai Chi

A recent article in the Sunday Mail suggests that improving ones balance (as Tai Chi does) helps to curtail the onset of Alzheimer’s and dementia.

From his book (100 Simple Things you Can Do To Prevent Alzheimer’s) Jean Carper quotes the following:

*As heart breaking and devastating as Alzheimer’s is, optimism is growing that we can lessen the risk and possibly save ourselves. Experts now say that whether we develop the disease – the most common form of dementia, accounting for 60 per cent of cases – is not random or fate, nor an inevitable consequence of ageing. For nearly 40 years, as a medical writer and senior medical correspondent for TV network CNN, I have followed closely the findings on Alzheimer’s and age-related memory loss, including a new surge of research into how to deter, slow or even reverse the pathology and symptoms.*

More interestingly for us he quotes the following:

*Researchers at the University of Washington tested the physical ability of 2,288 people aged 65 or over with no signs of dementia. After six years, 319 had developed dementia. Those with the best balance and walking abilities at the start of the study were three times less likely to have developed dementia as those with lower physical abilities.*

*The good news is that practicing can dramatically improve your balance within months or even weeks. Be sure to include exercises to maintain and improve balance in your daily routine, especially after the age of 60.*

*Try balancing on one foot or stand up and sit down without using your hands. Adults of all ages should make it a goal to stand on one foot, eyes open, for at least 30 seconds.*

This sounds like a very good reason to me to practice Tai Chi and Chi Kung.

Some other great tips in his book follow:

- *A cocktail or glass of wine may help delay dementia as it is an anti-inflammatory (just don’t over do it as it will have the opposite affect.)*
- *Eat two apples or drink two glasses of apple juice per day as it can boost the production of acetylcholine in the brain which is the same thing the prescribed drug Aricept (donepezil) does to treat Alzheimer’s, according to recent research*
- *Eat red berries and strawberries as they block brain-cell-destroying oxidative damage and inflammation and can also stimulate the birth of new brain cells*
- *Keep a close watch on your blood pressure*

So in conclusion, Eat, Drink (the right things), practice Tai Chi/Chi Kung and be Merry.

Neil Rankine - Instructor



### Tai Chi

#### *A view from the far side*

Stressed out, walking wounded, terminally curious, looking for something (the meaning of life for just a few quid a week). Too old for kick-boxing, too young for Bingo, longing for a leisure pursuit you can do in the clothes you slob round the house in. Well look no further - Tai Chi could be for you, come for health, come for relaxation, come to learn the ultimate self-defense (but don’t forget how to run away).

Yes all this and more, chill out, turn on, and disappear into your own dantien or whatever else you want it to be. A design for living possibly, a promotion for sanity defiantly, but mostly a life less ordinary....

Bob Flynn - Dudley student

One supreme fact which I have discovered is that it is not willpower but **imagination** that creates.

Imagination is the creative force.

Imagination creates reality.

JOHN KEATS