



Tai Chi Newsletter

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Community Based Tai Chi & Chi-Kung for everyone

Improvement cannot always be measured, it is something you feel

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Take the balance challenge to help you live longer

Unleash your inner five-year-old and practise standing on one leg, to keep your brain working hard.

People want to get fit and healthy, but they often forget the importance of working on their balance. Worldwide, falls are the most common cause of accidental death after road traffic accidents, and unless you do something about it, your balance will deteriorate as you get older. And having a good balance is a powerful predictor of how long and how healthily you will live. A good test of your balance is to see how long you can stand on one leg, first with your eyes open and then closed. Take your shoes off, put your hands on your hips and stand on one leg. See how long you last. The test is over as soon as you shift your planted foot or put your raised foot down on the ground. Best of three. Then repeat, with your eyes closed. You will be dismayed by how quickly you start to fall over. Here are the targets that different age groups should be able to manage:

- Under 40: 45 seconds with eyes open, 15 seconds with eyes closed.
- Aged 40-49: 42 seconds open, 13 seconds closed.
- Aged 50-59: 41 seconds open, 8 seconds closed.
- Aged 60-69: 32 seconds open, 4 seconds closed.
- Aged 70-79: 22 seconds open, 3 seconds closed.

How much does it matter? In a study published in the BMJ in 2014, researchers tested 2,760 men and women who, at that time of testing, were all 53 years old. They measured grip strength, how quickly they could stand upright from sitting and how long they could stand on one leg with their eyes closed.

When the researchers returned 13 years later, they found that the tests had all, independently, predicted the chance that some-

one would die over that period, but the one-legged standing test was the best. Those individuals who lasted less than two seconds were three times more likely to have died than those who held it for 10 seconds or more.

Why is this balance test so important? It's because it is so taxing. Your brain normally uses three different types of information to keep you upright: your eyes, your vestibular system (a sort of spirit level you have in your inner ear), and proprioceptors in your limbs that send signals to your brain, telling it what is going on. When you remove your eyesight, the brain has to work much harder to keep you steady.

The good news is you can improve your balance with yoga or tai chi. How about practising balancing on one leg while brushing my teeth? You can find other suggestions from the NHS's balance exercises. It really is worth taking the time to work at it.



A Meditation For You To Try

*** The Pebble....



While sitting still and breathing slowly, think of yourself as a pebble which is falling through a clear stream.

While sinking, there is no intention to guide your movement.

Sink toward the spot of total rest on the gentle sand of the river-bed.

Continue meditating on the pebble until your mind and body are at complete rest:
A pebble resting on the sand.

Maintain this peace and relaxation for a half hour while watching your breath.

No thoughts about the past or future can pull you away from your present peace.
The universe exists in this present moment.

No desire can pull you away from this present peace.

There are many many meditations, so if you have a favourite that maybe is not so well publicized let us have it and we can put it in our next book to share with others.



The Ego-climber

I was having a bookshelf clearout and came across a book I haven't read in a long time - **Zen And The Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance**. The section below struck a chord following Jenny's article on the Martial Art Moses. Phrases like 'to eat bitter' or 'to be mindful' are common places in martial arts or any field of endeavour for that matter. I hope you enjoy and reflect on what is written below.

He (Phædrus) never reached the mountain. After the third day he gave up, exhausted, and the pilgrimage went on without him. He said he had the physical strength but that physical strength wasn't enough. He had the intellectual motivation but that wasn't enough either. He didn't think he had been arrogant but thought that he was undertaking the pilgrimage to broaden his experience, to gain understanding for himself. He was trying to use the mountain for his own purposes and the pilgrimage too. He regarded himself as the fixed entity, not the pilgrimage or the mountain, and thus wasn't ready for it. He speculated that the other pilgrims, the ones who reached the mountain, probably sensed the holiness of the mountain so intensely that each footstep was an act of devotion, an act of submission to this holiness. The holiness of the mountain infused into their own spirits enabled them to endure far more than anything he, with his greater physical strength, could take.

To the untrained eye ego-climbing and selfless climbing may appear identical. Both kinds of climber's place one foot in front of the other. Both breathe in and out at the same rate. Both stop when tired. Both go forward when rested. But what a difference! The ego-climber is like an instrument that's out of adjustment. He puts his foot down an instant too soon or too late. He's likely to miss a beautiful passage of sunlight through the trees. He goes on when the sloppiness of his step shows he's tired. He rests at odd times. He looks up the trail trying to see what's ahead even when he knows what's ahead because he just looked a second before.

He goes too fast or too slow for the conditions and when he talks his talk is forever about somewhere else, something else. He's here but he's not here. He rejects the here, is unhappy with it, wants to be farther up the trail but when he gets there will be just as unhappy because then it will be "here." What he's looking for, what he wants, is all around him, but he doesn't want that because it is all around him. Every step's an effort, both physically and spiritually, because he imagines his goal to be external and distant.

This seems to me to be the problem of every martial arts Moses out there and maybe even the students who are too hard on themselves because 'they just can't quite get it'. What is 'it' anyway?

The Big B!— And How To Avoid It.

It has been said by THE BRITISH PAIN SOCIETY that 10,000,000 people in the UK are affected by back pain and that it costs the economy £5 billion pounds in lost revenue every year. It may be secondary to another condition so that curing the back pain will not solve the underlying problem, so that the pain can then re-occur maybe over and over again.

Causes of back pain can literally range from inactivity to over activity and everything in between. It is not normally the result of a serious accident or disease, but more likely to result from a sprain, strain, pinched nerve, or perhaps a minor injury.

Many cases will resolve themselves in a few days or within the month; others will need to consult their GP. (Severe or continued pain should never be ignored or self medicated)

Stress tightens muscles that are then vulnerable to injury or strain. This in turn can lead to depression that can bring on poor lifestyle choices such as over-eating (weight gain), smoking etc. that then exacerbates the back pain.

However it is not all "doom and gloom". Awareness of risk factors means that issues can be identified before they become a real problem.



Some Of The More Simple Common Risk Factors Are:

- Driving in a hunched position.
- Driving for long periods without taking a break.
- Overuse of muscles, usually due to sport or repetitive movements (Repetitive Strain Injury RSI)
- Being overweight. Extra weight places more pressure on the spine.
- Smoking can damage muscle tissue and affect circulation and is often partnered with a sedentary lifestyle (maybe because smoking can cause breathlessness that predisposes to less activity)
- Pregnancy. The excess weight of carrying a baby can place additional strain on the spine.
- Medication. Long term use of medication is known to weaken bones (especially corticosteroids)
- Stress. Causes muscle tension in the back that can lead to pain, depression and poor lifestyle choices.

TIPS AND ADVICE

Avoid sleeping in an awkward position (in a chair) as this can cause neck pain. Sitting in a draught can cause neck ache (muscle ache). Apply heat by using a hot water bottle (protect with a cover so not too warm) now there are also many

microwavable heat packs available, some containing Lavender or soothing herbs. These items may reduce pain and spasm of the muscles.

Sleep on a low firm pillow.

Avoid driving until pain resolved.

Stress will contribute to back ache. In addition caffeine, dehydration, lack of sleep and low sodium can increase risk of spasm/cramping.

Treat spasm with heat.

Treat inflammation with ice.

Don't try to vigorously exercise back pain away. Take slow steps to recovery.

Sleep with pillows under legs to elevate them.

Try easy stretches in line with your state of healing.

Postural treatments work in 50-60% of patients
Acupuncture and massage do work for some and are worth investigating making sure you check the practitioner is registered with the governing body of their profession.

Maintain good posture at all times. (Tai Chi and Alexander technique)

Keep moving to keep mobile. Too much rest will allow muscles to weaken and delay recovery.

Walking, swimming, (especially backstroke and using exercise bikes are all excellent ways to strengthen back muscles.

Always bend with your knees and your hips, NOT your back.

Never bend and twist at the same time.

Always lift and carry objects close to the body.

In conclusion, simple back pain is something we could all suffer with as we get older, the technical term when you ring for your X-Ray results seems to be "Wear and Tear" and the treatment? pain killers when required!

However being aware of posture, risks and remedies can make life a lot easier.

Your local chemist is now much better equipped to give you good advice and also they will refer you to your GP if they feel it necessary.

But guess what? One of the most effective mobilising and strengthen exercises you can do, both for prevention and recover, is **Tai Chi**. It is a whole body musculoskeletal training system. It is also a mind and body approach to wellness so acts to ease stress and anxiety by mindful practice.

Just 15 minutes per day can show real benefits with improved circulation, mobility, muscle tone and posture.

Even push-hands is designed to improve balance awareness

Inner Peace: This is so true

If you can start the day without caffeine,
If you can be cheerful, ignoring aches and pains,
If you can resist complaining and boring people with your troubles,
If you can eat the same food every day and be grateful for it,
If you can understand when you're loved ones are too busy to give you any time,
If you can take criticism and blame without resentment,
If you can conquer tension without medical help,
If you can relax without alcohol,
If you can sleep without the aid of drugs,

...Then, You Are Probably the family dog



How Long Is A Piece Of String?

I recently had a long telephone conversation with a nice man who rang to try and get some information on the martial elements of Tai Chi and if it would give him the ability to defend himself.

The call had been instigated by him watching a kung fu movie, where the male actor playing the starring role had been supposedly using Tai Chi in the fight scenes.

He said he was very confused by what he saw as there was so much leaping about, high kicks, the blocks seemed to be very stiff, and the use of strength was evident. All of this was the opposite of what he believed was Tai Chi.

We discussed at length the differences between internal and external, which he did understand as he had practiced several other martial arts.

He was now interested in Tai Chi as now being in his 50s he felt it was a more realistic art for him.

He also seemed to feel that much of the martial strategies he had learnt from the other Kung Fu he had tried would not be effective for him personally, but was not sure he would be able to relax enough to make Tai Chi work for him either!

He felt he would like to come to our classes but wondered how long it would be before he could leave the beginners class and all the "slow stuff" and begin to feel confident that he could defend himself if attacked!

I tried to explain that everyone has the ability to attain this, but it really did depend as much on how long it took for them to develop as a person with the confidence that Tai Chi WOULD work for them, as their ability to learn techniques and forms.

However, he kept pushing for a time scale 6 months, 1 year, 2 years, sometime, never.

I had to be very honest with this man, because I feel that it is the right way to be.

Trust is essential and to betray the trust of potential students just to “snare” them for your class is not acceptable and will only lead to their disappointment of you as a person and of the Association.

I told him it would be easy to placate him by giving him a timescale that was very competitive with other arts, but the truth of it was that I had no idea how long his journey would be before he felt confident that he had attained the level of physical and mental ability he sought. It could be never!

He was silent for a while, and then said “I am glad you said that I would not have believed you if you had given me an off the cuff answer, as other people I have spoken to have”

Train and be truthful.... By Jenny Peters



Tai Chi weekend September 2023

Each year we have a focus for the weekend camp and this years theme is “Breathing life into your tai chi”

Saturday 2nd will include tai chi form work in the morning - Breath, intention, and expansion. The afternoon will focus on martial application without effort - sensitivity training, Sung, flow, and root.

Sunday 3rd You will be learning qigong (chi-kung). We will focus on the three refinements of mind, body, and breath.

The days will run

- 9.30 for 10am start
- 10am to 12.30pm with a 10 minute break about 11.30am.
- Lunch 12.30 to 1.30pm – lunch
- 1.30pm to 4pm with a 10 minute break about 2.45pm

Cost

The cost per day will be £40 per person (Kai-Ming members) £60 (non-members)

More details at <https://shorturl.at/gtz06>

Venue:

Weoley Hill Village Hall, Bournville. B29 4AR.



Ba Duan Jin – 8 strands of the Brocade

Qigong workshop 15th June 1-4pm live on zoom

The Eight strands (sections) of the Brocade have been attributed to one of the legendary Eight Immortals of Chinese folklore, Chong Li-quan. It is said to be one of the most practiced qigong sets worldwide.

There are a few slight variations, and the sequence is not fixed. It is merely a LIST of individual exercises that should be repeated 7 – 15 times. If you don't have time to do them all, pick one or two and practice them only.

It can be practiced seated or standing both as a relaxed set, and a stretch and strengthening set.

“Breathing in and out in various manners, spitting out the old and taking in the new, walking like a bear and stretching their neck like a bird to achieve longevity

this is what such practitioners of Dao-yin, cultivators of the body and all those searching for long life like Ancestor Peng, enjoy.”

Chuang-tzu, Chapter 15, circa 300 BCE.

The workshop will be live on zoom for £35

Details and booking at shorturl.at/ijxJM

Advanced monthly training sessions.

Sessions are held each month for 3 hours at Weoley Hill Village Hall, Bournville, to enable instructors time for their own training and for more advanced students to gain the time to develop a deeper understanding of the application of tai chi chuan.

Sessions are Sunday's 9.30-12.30 at £30 per person.

Below are training dates for 2023

June 11th

July 9th

Aug 13th

Sept 2nd & 3rd – annual weekend camp – 9.30am to 4.00pm

October 8th

Nov 5th

