



Painting the Rainbow 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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The Role of Foot Physiology in Balance and Falls Prevention in Older Adults:

Why the Feet Matter—and How Tai Chi Can Help

Did you know that from as early as age 50, your balance can start to decline, and a large part of this problem can be linked to our feet.

As I am over 50 (just !!!! LOL), I began thinking about this fact, as I have noticed my feet feel “different” at times when I am out walking.

It’s hard to explain how, but, put simply, the soles feel thinner! And because of this, my contact with the floor is different. Especially on uneven ground. And I feel at times unbalanced. In tai chi terms, I suppose I have lost some of my root.

I bought some arch supports for my shoes, and this does help, but I’m wondering if I’m imagining this change in my feet and balance. And this led me to do some research on the foot and question if, in fact, it did play a part in the over 50 “Weeble’s” syndrome.

Falls are one of the leading causes of injury, reduced confidence, and loss of independence in older adults. Public health guidance often emphasises the importance of leg strength, reaction time, vision, and awareness of environmental hazards. However, one of the most critical contributors to balance and postural control is frequently underappreciated: the physiology of the foot.

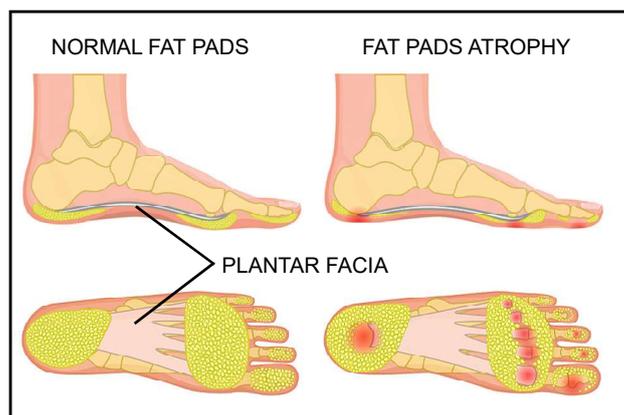
As the body’s interface with the ground, the feet are not passive structures. They are dynamic, sensory-rich, and biomechanically sophisticated. Age-related changes—particularly thinning of the plantar fat pads, weakening of the plantar fascia, and reduced sensory feedback—can significantly impair balance and increase fall risk. Importantly, movement practices such as Tai Chi directly address many of these changes in ways that conventional exercise often does not.

Why Your Feet Are the Key to Better Balance

When we practise Tai Chi, we often focus on posture, breathing and relaxation. But there is one part of the body that quietly supports everything we do — the feet.

Your feet are your foundation. Every shift of weight, every step, and every turn begins there. If your feet are strong and responsive, balance feels easier. If they are weak, sore or numb, balance becomes more difficult.

As we get older, natural changes happen in the feet. Understanding this helps us see why Tai Chi is so effective for improving stability and preventing falls.



What Changes with Age?

1. Less natural cushioning

Under the heel and the ball of the foot are soft pads that act like shock absorbers. Over time, these pads become thinner and less springy, known as atrophy. This can cause discomfort when standing or walking.

When the feet are uncomfortable, we often stiffen up or change how we move — and stiffness reduces balance.

2. Weaker arch support

Along the bottom of the foot is a strong band of tissue that helps support the arch. With age, it can lose some strength and elasticity. The foot may flatten slightly or feel less stable.

If the foot is too rigid or too floppy, it cannot respond quickly to changes in weight. That makes balance harder.

3. Reduced sensation

The soles of your feet contain thousands of tiny sensors. They tell your brain where your weight is and whether you are leaning too far in any direction.

As we age, this sensitivity can reduce. The brain then receives less clear information, which can slow balance reactions. This is one reason falls become more common later in life.

How Tai Chi Helps

The good news is that Tai Chi directly trains the feet — even if we do not always think about it that way.

Slow weight shifting

Tai Chi involves gently transferring weight from one leg to the other. This strengthens the feet gradually and improves awareness of where your weight is.

Mindful foot contact

When you pay attention to how your foot meets the floor — heel, ball, full sole — you stimulate those sensory receptors. Attention improves connection.

Gentle strengthening

The small muscles inside the feet work continuously during practice. Over time, this supports the arch and improves stability — without strain or impact.

Building confidence

Fear of falling makes people tense and cautious. Tai Chi encourages relaxed, upright movement. As your balance improves, so does your confidence.

A Simple Practice

Try this between classes:

- Stand upright and feel your weight across both feet.
- Slowly shift forward and back. Notice how the pressure changes.
- Gently spread your toes and relax them again.

Just a few mindful minutes can “wake up” the feet. In Tai Chi we talk about rooting. True rooting is not about pressing down. It is about being connected and responsive through the soles of the feet.

Strong, aware feet create steady balance. And steady balance supports confidence, independence and ease of movement — both in practice and in daily life.

By Jenny Peters



Walk Off Your Arthritis.

We felt it a nice idea to continue the theme and decided to share information on the benefits of mindful walking.

Researchers from Boston University have published a paper with the results of their two-year study on almost 1,800 men and women with osteoarthritis of the knee or judged to be at risk of it. Some 8 million people in Britain have osteoarthritis, the most common form of joint disease.

Stiff, swollen and painful joints can make walking difficult. Everyday activities can be a struggle. The participants in the study aged between 50 and 79, wore pedometers for a week and the number of steps they took each day was logged.

Their walking speed was logged. Their walking speed was timed and they filled in a questionnaire about how easy they found tasks such as walking and dressing.

They filled in the form again two years later and underwent a second walking test, to check test, to check if they had slowed down.

Few of those who had clocked up more than 3,000 steps a day (roughly a mile and a half) had dramatically worsened. And walking at least 6,000 steps was particularly beneficial, the journal Arthritis Care & Research reports.

The results could not be explained simply by those who were fittest at the start of the study declining more slowly than others, researchers said.

Overall, the more the adults walked, the better off they were two years later.

Each extra 1,000 steps cut the odds of a big reduction in mobility by almost 20 per cent—probably by keeping the joints lubricated.

Dr Daniel White a researcher said, “There is no need for people to go to the gym—steps taken during activities such as commuting, housework and gardening all count.” He continued, “As clinicians, we should be promoting walking in our patients with knee osteoarthritis. We should have them measure their physical activity with a pedometer, much like people monitor their weight with a scale.”

Professor Alan Silman, of Arthritis Research UK said; “Exercise such as walking is vitally important for people with osteoarthritis of the knee, as long as they wear sensible trainer-type shoes with soft, thick soles and pace themselves. Using a walking stick can also help to reduce pain.”

He added, “Many older people are worried walking will make their osteoarthritis worse, but we want to encourage them to keep doing the things they love”. (Like Tai Chi maybe?)



Become a Painting the Rainbow Tai Chi Qigong Instructor

Have you ever thought you'd like to help out at your tai chi class? Have you ever wondered what is needed to start the journey of becoming an instructor? Would you like to help other people, maybe even have your own class?

Maybe 2020 is your year to get involved... We're always looking for keen, personable people as there are so many people out there that can benefit from attending classes, but we need more people to make that possible.

If you are interested, please contact Jenny or Mark on (0121) 251 6172 or maybe speak to your instructor.

The requirements are:

PtR trainees 2026

1. Should have been attending a Kaiming class and/or Painting the Rainbow (PtR) class for a minimum of 1 year
2. Observe and Help at a PtR class
3. Following successful completion of the year's training, you will be required to attend CPD day at least once a year for updates and continuing development.
4. Have at least 3 hours a week to commit to PtR
5. Part sponsorship by Kai Ming / PtR may be available to attend the Rehabilitation course, recognised by CIMSPA, for keen trainees who join the PtR team.

For anyone interested, we will give you plenty of support.