January 2018 Issue 021



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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To Stress Or Not To Stress That Is The Question? Not To Stress Is The Answer.

Over the 25 years, I worked as a Practice Sister at a GP surgery I noticed the levels of stress in patients and staff rose consistently year by year. Many things in society were responsible for this. Pressures of modern day living took their toll. The more anxious and stressed people became, the more they smoked, drank, comfort ate and found less time for doing things that they enjoyed in an effort to fit more things into an already overflowing day.

The physical signs were Cholesterol levels increased, chest pains were more frequent, asthma attacks increased, indigestion and irritable bowel symptoms reared their heads often.

Psychological signs were increase in migraines and headaches, depressive episodes, increase in over-concerns about general health, anxiety and panic attacks, and an alarming upturn in requests for medication for these worries. It's got to the point that GPs are now advised to monitor and decrease the use of anti-anxiety and anti-depressive drugs regularly in favour of talking therapies (CBT etc.), both of which the patient may have to wait 6 weeks or more for an appointment which is a long time if you are overwhelmed by any of these conditions.

So, to the point, I asked Mark if he could maybe write something for the newsletter

regarding ways to combat the worries and anxieties that can easily creep into our lives whatever age we are, to compliment your Tai Chi practice.

Take it away Mark!———

Well here goes.... The are two types of stress (1) emotional (2) physical and tai chi is an amazing tool for both.

Emotional stresses are the stresses of daily life as mentioned above by Jenny; these can be helped by learning to slow down and become mindful. Now I realise Mindfulness has become a massive trend in recent times but it is more than just sitting quietly and using a colouring book or attending a quiet meditation class; it is about putting your attention in the current moment and on your current activity. The attention enables you to put all thoughts down and just choose one: your breath, your balance, a single thought etc. It overcomes our attempts at mental multi-tasking, which inevitably is actually multi-worrying.

The brain has two key parts (for ease of this article), the executive brain and primal brain (limbic system). The executive makes all the logical conscious decision and the primal runs everything else, almost like back-office staff. The issue is that staff need correct training as when left to their own devices they can cause problems. I like to think of mindfulness as 'staff training'. By enabling the mind to be quiet and attentive, it learns really efficiently; when not quiet it bases decision on past experience and best guesses. Quiet your mind through tai chi and chi-kung or even just by paying attention to your natural breath, then choose something to work on like letting thoughts come and go without holding on to them or trying to ignore them. The

state of non-judgement you develop is not about right or wrong, negative or positive, it is about useful or not in this current moment interesting or not in this current moment. Start with a simple practice of just a few minutes by simply noticing the world around you one element at at time, then noticing yourself – breath, position, weight etc. A good starting place is the App 'Headspace' which gives you a few sessions for free. If you'd like to discuss this in more details please contact me.

Physical Stresses are structural stresses i.e. how you move your body and use your balance. The key issue here is that we walk by moving out of balance (leaning forwards or backward) and catching ourselves by getting the leg there in time; running involves leaning more and propelling yourself forwards. This is how trips and slips occur as your leg doesn't get there to catch you or your weight pushes on a slippy surface (mud etc.).

In Tai Chi we aim to move into balance by checking the ground first before committing body weight to it. This awareness of the ground is developed through tai chi walking and form practice. Relaxation is not slouching or slumping, it is aligning your body correctly so that it feels alive and buoyant (sung). Gravity is always pulling us down and correct alignment takes away the stresses placed on us by the effects of gravity. There has been a lot of research published in recent years about the postural stresses due to excessive use of phones and tablets; looking down not only risks bumping into things but puts masses stresses through the body as you tries to hold up the heavy big lump called a head! Some relatively simple exercises to build structural awareness are: sit to stand -

use a hard chair and don't use your arms; tai chi warm-up exercises with your focus on being suspended from above; and standing post (Zhang Zhong) where you can check the alignment of hips, shoulders and ears etc. Alexander technique is excellent too. Tai Chi is a muscular skeletal rehabilitation system in its own right; it is designed to harness natural function and intrinsic strength. We all develop poor postural habits and movement through normal life activities; tai chi is a mindful refinement tool that aims to correct these errors and remove the stresses. Some people attend manual handling courses at work to teach them how to lift and move correctly; tai chi does exactly that with the bonus of improved well-being; it's a self-defence for life.

To keep the stresses of living at bay we all need to practice with mindful attention each day; to strengthen your body, strengthen your mind and relax into living. Grand-Master Cheng Man Ching was quoted as saying "We practice tai chi so that when you come to the point in your life that you know what you want, you will have the health and strength to enjoy it".



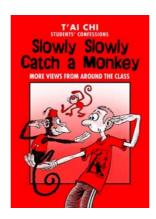
Wow... it is hard to believe it buts its 10 years since Jenny first had the idea of setting up Painting the Rainbow (PtR). It has grown so quickly that we are the 'go to' organisation for Birmingham City Council, AgeUK, special needs groups, local schools and more...

Tai Chi is such an inclusive art that the medical world are referring to it more and more. We have been involved with pulmonary rehab sessions since 2009, cardiac rehab since 2006 and I have been training NHS staff in tai chi for falls prevention since 2004. The tai chi in the park project started in 2013 in Cotteridge and now runs across the City in 20+ parks. We are working in secure mental health units, on research projects with the University and are currently writing the professional standards for tai chi and chi-kung to be applied nationally in this area of work.

Jenny's original aim was to make tai chi accessible to anyone, regardless of age or ability, without exclusion, and this mission statement still holds true. Others try to copy us but their approach has been to offer tai chi as a gentle exercise or even call it 'tai chi style exercise' but that misses the whole value of tai chi a mind and body approach to well-being. What truly makes PtR grow and strengthen is the quality and passion of instructors and the stories you share with us about the positive impact tai chi continues to have on your life.

We used to offer 'bring a friend week' but actually found we didn't need to promote it as you, the students, brings friends anyway because you want them to share in the many benefits of tai chi and chi-kung. Many of the now instructors first stated as students and hospital referred patients and gained so much that they wanted to help.

Maybe you're interested in taking that next step and are interested in becoming more involved with PtR, contributing to the newsletters and even training as an instructor, please do contact Jenny or Mark on 0121 251 6172



Tai Chi Book 3 is out!!

We have produced two previous volumes of "Students Confessions" and this will be our final one in the series. This is entitled "Slowly Slowly Catch a Monkey" and is about the tai chi journeys of each of us.

Chapters are written by both students and instructors to share their experiences. The first two volumes are on the 'must read' list for many other tai chi clubs and I can see this being equally as important.

It has just been released and copies are available in class or via our online shop at www.kaiming.co.uk. It is also available in Kindle on Amazon if you can't wait....

The launch price is £8.50 and as a special bonus, you can buy all three volumes as a set for £20 (while stocks last)

Please ask your instructor or contact Mark & Jenny on **0121 251 6172** or markpeters@kaiming.co.uk



As 2018 starts cold and dreary Jenny would like to share a poem she wrote and taken from her book 'Poems before Prozac'. The state we create is within all of us, not the weather or things around us. Find your own leopard skin hat or I'm sure Jenny won't mind if you borrow hers for a while.

Leopard Skin Prozac A little Silly poem

When times are sad and life is stressed Give a thought to how you get dressed Wearing Black could reflect your mood, Or maybe your thoughts turn to food So try and think of a place you were happy,

One day in your life it was hard to be snappy.

Cannes has always worked for me, Champagne in hand sat on the quay Covered in sun cream and with floppy hat

Maybe George Clooney was here where I'm sat!

So I had this idea within my head On a dull dreary morning as I got out of bed

How did I chase the blues away? To put myself in the place the rich play.

When my husband came downstairs in a mood just as flat

There was I making tea, in a big leopard skin hat!

It may not have been Cannes and the weather no brighter

But in my heart and mind I felt so much lighter.