

MOVING MEDITATIONS: TAI CHI & QIGONG

FAST FACTS

- It is estimated that 3.75 million people in the United States practice Tai Chi.¹
- Tai Chi is a practice that has grown out of the ancient spiritual healing tradition of Qigong, which is suspected to be more than 2,500 years old.
- Some forms of Tai Chi are considered martial arts training, and when the speed of the movements is increased, they can be used as defensive moves during battle.

WHAT ARE TAI CHI AND QIGONG?

Tai Chi and Qigong are moving meditations that build balance, coordination, strength, and functional capacity. Both practices combine the use of slow and deliberate movements with meditation and breathing practice. These practices were not developed to increase heart rates or burn calories; nevertheless, their impact on muscle control and balance are beneficial to athletes and non-athletes alike. Some research also suggests effects on metabolism.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TAI CHI AND QIGONG?

Although the practices of Tai Chi and Qigong are sometimes referred to interchangeably, Tai Chi is a practice that has grown from the Qigong tradition. Qigong, and the movements associated with the practice, was designed solely as a meditative and healing practice. The movements developed as a part of the Tai Chi tradition can be used as a martial art or applied to self-defense. Qigong can be very easy; thus it soothes the nervous system. Tai Chi is more complex, including foot movements, thus it is excellent for brain plasticity maximization. Tai Chi is often modified to be more like Qigong.

WHAT MEDICAL CONDITIONS DO TAI CHI AND QIGONG AFFECT?

Tai Chi and Qigong are used to help both physical and mental health conditions and to address symptoms related to chronic health concerns. They have been used to help with:

- Bone density
- Cancer-related symptoms
- Cardiopulmonary health
- Arthritis
- Fatigue
- Fibromyalgia
- Tension headaches
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Balance problems
- Cognitive decline
- Degenerative diseases
- Chronic pain
- Parkinson's disease
- Diabetes

Is there evidence that Qigong and Tai Chi are beneficial?

Yes, for certain conditions. These types of movement have been extensively researched, and we know how they affect the symptoms and sometimes the causes of various conditions.

- A systematic review and meta-analysis of Tai Chi in patients with type 2 diabetes found that people who practiced Tai Chi for 150 minutes per week had decreased glycosylated hemoglobin (a long-term indicator of lower blood sugar levels), reduced fasting blood sugar levels, decreased body mass index, and a better quality of life.²
- A systematic review and meta-analysis of Tai Chi for people with fatigue found that Tai Chi was not only more effective than conventional therapies for decreasing fatigue (particularly in cancer patients), but was also more effective in addressing depression and patients' sense of vitality and helping them sleep more.³
- A systematic review and meta-analysis of six randomized control trials of patients with Parkinson disease found that Tai Chi significantly improved balance, motor function, functional mobility, walking abilities, and step length.⁴

- A study of 74 patients over 60 with mild cognitive decline who engaged in a Tai Chi program twice a week for 16 weeks had improvements in their cognitive functioning and were better able to perform daily activities than those in the control group.⁵
- A systematic review and meta-analysis including 499 cancer patients found that those who participated in Qigong or Tai Chi classes had increased cancer-specific quality of life, improved immune system functioning, and decreased cortisol (stress hormone) levels.⁶
- A comprehensive review of the Tai Chi and Qigong research since 1992 found that Tai Chi and Qigong were safe and effective for several conditions that have the greatest medical costs—heart disease prevention, falls prevention, and neuro-psychological disorders.⁷

If you or your healthcare provider would like to explore more research on meditation's impact on a particular health concern, visit the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health and search for Tai Chi, or go directly to www.nccih.nih.gov/health/tai-chi-what-you-need-to-know

Is there more evidence that Qigong and Tai Chi help people with cancer?

In addition to the study mentioned above, Tai Chi appears to help with some cancer-related symptoms and with quality of life. Studies include:

- A 2018 review included 22 studies of more than 1200 people with different types of cancer. Participants who did 3 to 12 weeks of Tai Chi or Qigong had significantly less fatigue and depression. They slept better and had better quality of life overall. More studies are needed before doctors can make specific recommendations.⁸
- A 2020 review found that Tai Chi did not work better than conventional treatments for relieving pain, fatigue, and quality of life issues, but patients who used both Tai Chi and conventional treatments did better on these measures at 3 months than patients who did not.⁹

Some cancer centers offer Tai Chi or Qigong classes or special sessions. Ask your cancer care team or doctor if this is available at your hospital or treatment center.

Are there precautions, side effects, or safety concerns I should be aware of before I start Qigong or Tai Chi?

Tai Chi and Qigong are widely considered safe. Side effects are rare.

Precautions

- Some people have reported aches, pains, and soreness after engaging in Tai Chi or Qigong.

- If you are pregnant, have chronic back problems, or a hernia, please talk to your health care provider before trying Tai Chi or Qigong.
- Qigong and Tai Chi can be modified for people who have challenges, pain, or weakness or recently had surgery. Most practices can be done seated and in wheelchairs.

How often and for how long should you do Qigong or Tai Chi?

How often and how long depends on your own health and needs. Classes or a session with a teacher may last 45 to 60 minutes once or twice a week.

You can also do Tai Chi or Qigong at home, every day or now and then, for as few as 20 or 30 minutes. Just like any movement or exercise you enjoy, you may want to keep doing them even after you feel better.

Do I need to attend classes or work with a teacher to start Qigong or Tai Chi?

Not necessarily, but talk to your doctor before starting either of these practices. If you do not have an illness or injury that keeps you from doing the movements, you can try these practices on your own at home. You may want to go to classes or work with a teacher once you try them, especially if you enjoy practicing in a group.

What training or certifications do Qigong and Tai Chi practitioners have?

Tai Chi and Qigong practitioners are not regulated on a federal or a state level.

Currently, many independent organizations lead trainings and provide certifications to individuals who either take their courses or meet their qualifications. Although there are no official training guidelines, it's a good idea to make sure the provider's certification includes both education and experience.

Before attending a class, ask the instructor for his or her qualifications. Then, research the organization where they received their qualifications.

Because Qigong and Tai Chi are generally slow and easy, you may find that a teacher or practice leader leads a safe and effective class even if they do not have a lot of training. People who regularly practice Tai Chi and Qigong are often inspired to share what they have learned. Always take care and be responsible for yourself.

How do I find a Qigong or Tai Chi class near me?

First, you can search “Qigong near me” or “Tai Chi near me,” online.

Many local organizations, such as YMCAs, community centers, and social service organizations, offer classes. You may also want to look at the directories at these organizations:

- **Institute of Integral Qigong and Tai Chi (IIQTC):** IIQTC.org
- **National Qigong Association:** NOA.org
- **Tai Chi for Health Institute:** taiChiforhealthinstitute.org/instructors
- **Supreme Chi Living:** www.americantaichi.net/TaiChiQigongClass.asp
- **Tai Chi Foundation:** <http://www.taichifoundation.org/blog/find-class>

How much will attending Qigong or Tai Chi classes cost?

The cost of attending Qigong or Tai Chi classes varies depending on where you live, the class or instructor, and what you choose to do. Classes can cost less than \$20 per session at a community center, or several hundred dollars for an individual session with a master practitioner.

If you belong to a gym, spa, or community center, check to see if it includes free or discounted Qigong or Tai Chi classes that meet your needs. You can also find videos and classes online.

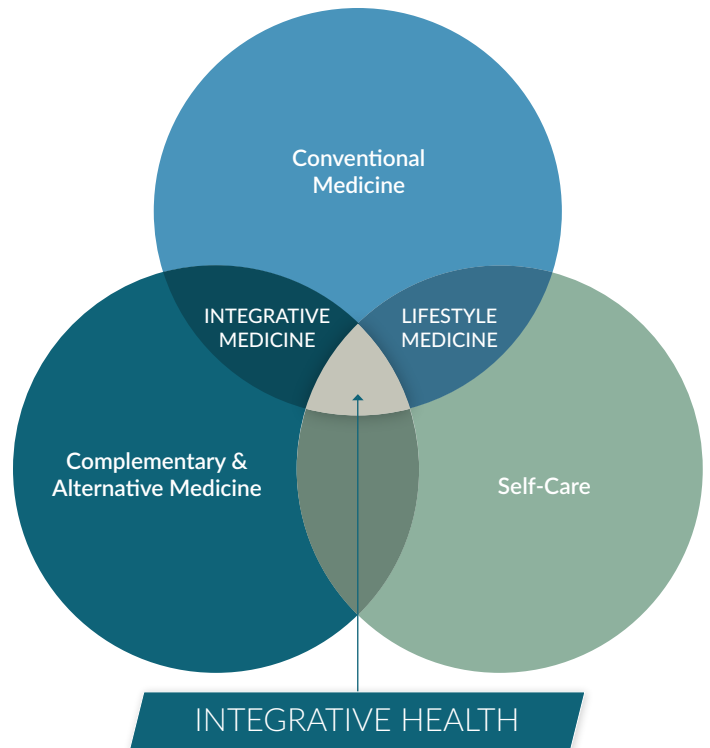
Will my insurance company cover the cost?

Currently, there are very few instances in which insurance companies cover the cost of Qigong or Tai Chi classes. However, if your doctor prescribes Qigong or Tai Chi through a physical therapist or occupational therapy program, there may be some coverage.

Should I tell my health care provider that I am attending Qigong or Tai Chi classes?

Let your health care providers know you would like to try Qigong or Tai Chi. It's a good idea to talk with your primary health care provider before you start Tai Chi, Qigong, or any new activity, especially if you are being treated for cancer or another health condition.

Open communication can help you and your health care providers avoid any complications or side effects. They can also help coordinate your care so what you do helps address your condition. Finally, be sure to let your providers know how Qigong or Tai Chi affects you.



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