

WELL | MOVE

Tai Chi May Help Prevent Falls

By NICHOLAS BAKALAR AUG. 8, 2017

Practicing tai chi helps older people improve their balance and avoid falls, a review of studies has found.

Tai chi is a form of Chinese martial arts now practiced as exercise. It involves a specific program of graceful movements, accompanied by deep breathing and mental focus, that slowly move the center of balance from one leg to the other.

Researchers found 10 randomized trials analyzing the effect of tai chi on the incidence of falls or the time until an elderly person first has a fall. All studies compared tai chi to usual care or other treatments like physical therapy, stretching or exercise.

The analysis, in the *Journal of the American Geriatric Society*, found that tai chi reduced the incidence of falls by 43 percent in those followed for less than a year and by 13 percent in those followed longer. There was no effect of tai chi on time to first fall, and there was some weak evidence that the practice reduced the number of falls that resulted in injury. Falls are a leading cause of broken hips and other serious problems in older men and women.

The lead author, Rafael Lomas-Vega of the University of Jaen in Spain, said that none of the studies showed any adverse effects of tai chi.

“We recommend tai chi as a safe practice for the prevention of falls,” he said.
“And some reviews have found positive effects on chronic conditions such as cancer, osteoarthritis and heart failure.”

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