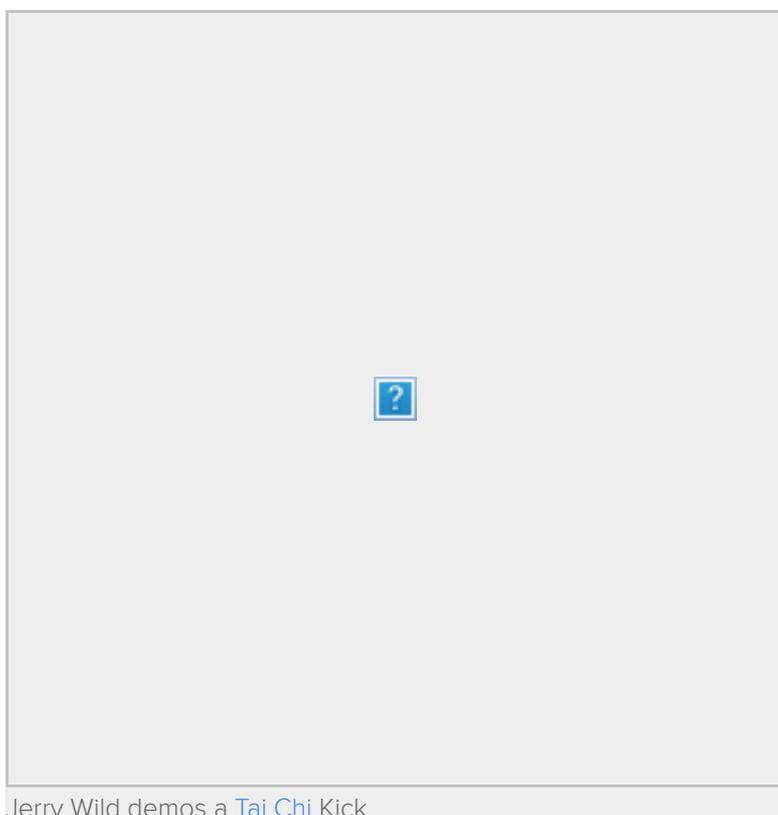


# A new hope for Parkinson's Disease patients: Tai Chi

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Jerry Wild demos a Tai Chi Kick

In the latest issue of *Young Parkinson's Newsletter*, published by [American Parkinson Disease Association \(APDA\)](#), there is a feature story of [Jerry Wild](#) and how Tai Chi helps Parkinson Disease patients. It certainly brings hope for this tragic degenerative disease.

Parkinson Disease (PD) represents four groups of symptoms relating to motor system disorders: 1. Tremor, or trembling in hands, arms, legs, jaw, and face; rigidity; 2. Stiffness of the limbs and trunk; 3. Bradykinesia, or slowness of movement; and 4. and Postural instability, or impaired balance and coordination. As these symptoms become more pronounced, patients may have difficulty

walking, talking, or completing other simple tasks, i.e. swallowing. In general, PD affects people over the age of 50. Early symptoms of PD are subtle and extremely difficult to identify. For some people the disease progresses faster than others. As the disease progresses, PD symptoms intensifies and may begin to interfere with patient's daily activities. Other symptoms may include depression and emotional changes. More severely, patients can experience difficulty swallowing, chewing, and speaking. Some patients report problems of urination, constipation, and sleep disruptions. Currently no blood or

laboratory tests can help with diagnosing sporadic PD. The diagnosis is based on medical history and a neurological examination. The disease can be difficult to diagnose accurately .

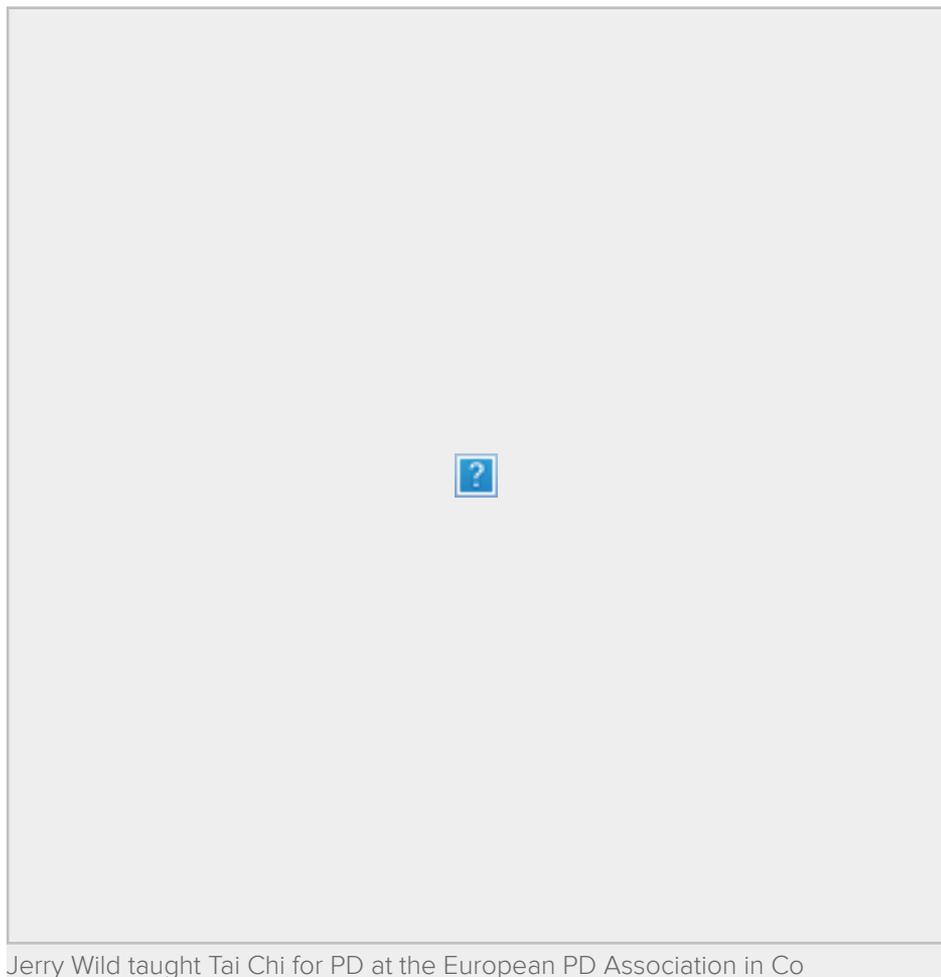
In Jerry's case, he started to feel rigidity, soreness, and sleep difficulty in his early 30's. Since he had perfect postural balance, his doctors never suspected that he had PD. But after 20 years, his problems were more persistent and his left leg felt numbness. The doctors decided to prescribe a PD medicine for him and see how his body would respond to it. The medicine did in fact have an effect on him and validated that he had PD -- the medicine also had side-effects. Then, doctors went back to his medical history and confirmed that he had lived with PD for 20 years. At the same time, they were amazed by his ability to maintain his balance.

PD is the result of the loss of dopamine-producing brain cells. But there is little explanation why dopamine-producing cells decrease. Researchers believe that genetics sometimes plays a role in the cellular breakdown. Fifteen to twenty percent of Parkinson's patients have a close relative who has experienced PD symptoms (such as a tremor). According to Jerry, his PD problem is hereditary.

Jerry is an active individual with many talents. He is a career architect. He was learning martial arts early in his life but was fascinated by Tai Chi movements and switched to Tai Chi in his early 20's. He studied **Yang Style Tai Chi** as well as Chen Man-Ch'ing Style Tai Chi. He also shared his love of Tai Chi with others by teaching at St. Louis Community College and Gold's Gym in Maryland Heights, MO.

According to Jerry, his doctors were surprised by the delayed deterioration of his PD symptoms. They attributed it to the possibility of Tai Chi practice. They think that he could be wheel-chaired ten years ago if he was not actively with Tai Chi. After the diagnose, Jerry joined the local APDA and learned first-hand that many PD patients fall frequently due to PD. He became a PD activist and joined famous Hollywood Star Michael J Fox in PD research fundraising in New York. He also tries to help them through Tai Chi. As a PD patient, Jerry fully understands the challenges that the PD patients encounter. He modified the Tai Chi into a 19-movement form to be more suitable for PD patients and their caretakers to learn.

Through the local APDA, Jerry learned that Washington University in St. Louis, MO is doing research on PD. He contacted them and volunteered to teach PD patients Tai Chi for scientific research. This resulted in a study called Tai Chi improves



Jerry Wild taught Tai Chi for PD at the European PD Association in Co

balance and mobility in people with Parkinson disease in 2008. The study was conducted by Dr. Hackney and Dr. Earhart at Washington University. It examined the effects of Tai Chi on balance, gait, and mobility in people with PD. Thirty-three people with PD were randomly assigned to either a Tai Chi group or a control group. The Tai Chi group participated in 20 one-hour long training sessions completed within 10-13 weeks; whereas, the control group had two testing sessions between 10 and 13 weeks apart without interposed training. The Tai Chi group improved more than the control group on the Berg Balance Scale, UPDRS, Timed Up and Go, tandem stance test, six-minute walk, and backward walking. Neither group improved in forward walking or the one leg stance test. **All Tai Chi participants reported satisfaction with the program and improvements in well-being. "Tai Chi appears to be an appropriate, safe and effective form of exercise for some individuals with mild-moderately severe PD", states the study.**

The European PD Association was very interested in Jerry's work. They invited him to teach a workshop during their annual convention hosted in Croatia in 2007. Jerry has been invited to do workshops for seniors and PD patients in the U.S.

According to Jerry, with more Tai Chi practice, other PD symptoms might be mitigated. Hopefully more funding will be available to conduct further research on the Tai Chi's impact as a long-term PD intervention method.

**For more info:** Contact Jerry Wild at [jerrywild@charter.net](mailto:jerrywild@charter.net) for more Tai Chi for PD info.



**Violet Li**

Tai Chi Examiner