

Angelina Jolie should start taking Tai Chi lessons

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Angelina Jolie

Photo by Adam Berry/Getty Images

[Angelina Jolie](#) is a powerhouse. She can act, and she can direct. She has received many awards for her film career as well as recognitions for her humanitarian work around the globe. She is one of the highest paid actresses in Hollywood. It seems that nothing can stop her if she sets her mind on it, except recently she was housebound and could not attend the premiere of her own film, "Unbroken," due to [chicken pox](#). Later 39-year-old Jolie described her experience of having chickenpox to Al Roker at *TODAY's Show* as itchy, annoying, miserable and absurd.

Absurd as it may seem. Yes, adults can get chickenpox just as children do. Worse off, once people get chickenpox, they are more susceptible to [shingles](#) or herpes zoster at a later age. After a chickenpox infection, the virus remains dormant in the roots of nerves, and the immune system normally keeps it at bay. Once the immune system weakens as people age, the virus can be reactive. Besides being itchy, shingles can be painful too. According to a report by *TIME*, one in three people in the U.S. has shingles.

The good news is that you can reduce your chances of getting shingles by boosting your immune system. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends adults age 60 and above get vaccinated with Zostavax. But vaccine is not 100% effective. Additionally, there are side effects and the cost of the vaccine. The best news is that you can practice [Tai Chi](#) (Taiji) to improve the [immunity](#).

Dr. Michael Irwin is a member of the Advisory Council of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine and the past president of the Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) Research Society. Additionally, he is current President-Elect of the Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research. Dr. Irwin is the Associate Editor of the journal Brain, Behavior and Immunity and has recently served as the Associate Editor of Psychosomatic Medicine. His principal research interests focus on the mechanisms of neuroimmune interactions and the impact of PNI processes on disease. In 2007, he and other scientists published the study, "Tai Chi Boosts Immunity to Shingles Virus in Older Adults," which was sponsored by National Institutes of Health (NIH).

In their randomized-control-trial study, Tai Chi alone was found to increase participants' immunity to varicella as much as the vaccine typically produces in 30- to 40-year-old adults, and Tai Chi combined with the vaccine produced a significantly higher level of immunity, about a 40 percent increase, over that produced by the vaccine alone. The study further showed that the Tai Chi group's rate of increase in immunity over the course of the 25-week study was double that of the control group that only studied health related subjects. In addition, the Tai Chi group reported significant improvements in physical functioning, bodily pain, vitality and mental health. For more details, read "[Taichi improves old adults' immunity, sleep quality and many other health issues](#)".

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