

## Childhood Obesity and Tai Chi

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How old is the child? **15-years old**. Hold it. If the kid is obese, according to [Geetha Raghuv eer](#), MD, MPH, a cardiologist at Children's Mercy Hospital and Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Missouri – Kansas City School of Medicine, **his “vascular age” is actually 45-years**. Dr. Raghuv eer was quoted (see [link](#) here) that 75% of the obese children have more than three risk factors for coronary artery disease.



Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei worked with school children in Kansas City, Missouri. (1)  
*Master Gary Huff*



*Sequoia School*

In the recent released report [Obesity Threatens America's Future 2011](#) by [The Trust for America's Health](#) and [the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#), it shows that childhood obesity rates are climbing up fast. It is believed that **one out of three kids now is considered overweight (with BMI between 25.0 and 29.9) or obese (with BMI above 30)**. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) shows that obesity now affects 17% of all children and adolescents in the U.S. – triple the rate from just one generation ago. American Institute for Cancer Research [site](#) offers a free easy-to-use online calculator, which you put in a person's height and weight, it shows his BMI instantly.

As stated in the article of [Tai Chi and weight loss](#), Tai Chi has been proven to have many health benefits especially in weight loss. This holds true for children.

School bullying has reached an epidemic portion. Oftentimes, the overweight or obese kids are ridiculed because of their sizes. It makes harder for overweight or obese kids putting on gym clothes to exercise in front of their peers. They are also afraid to be laughed at when their body jiggles as they run or jump. Tai Chi does not require any tight clothing. Most Tai Chi forms are smooth with fluid movements and will not cause body to shake.

Kids can make friends when they attend group classes. The camaraderie among kids can make them really enjoy the workout. A Tai Chi class is more fun than jogging on a treadmill.

Many parents, especially the single parents, face schedule challenges all the time. Many admit that it is hard to enroll a kid in a team sport, whose practice normally is scheduled either right after school or in the late afternoon when parents are still in work. Therefore, latch-key children stay home after school

watching TV or playing computer games. Tai Chi classes mostly can be arranged in the evening and allow family a good dinner time before the class. Some of the classes can be taken by both parents and kids together.

Unlike team sports, kids can practice at home to keep themselves active. Tai Chi does not require any equipment so it is more affordable. It does not require a large space for practice. Kids can practice either in the backyard or inside the house. There is absolutely no worry that kids may put a hole in the wall while kicking.

Tai Chi is very safe. You will not get a call at work that Johnny dislocates his shoulder during Tai Chi practice.

Like other [martial arts](#), Tai Chi teaches discipline, morale, ethics (Wu De), self-esteem, and self-defense. It is not just good for the body, but also good for the mind and spirit.

Tai Chi helps reducing stress. Kids' school work and grade can improve accordingly once the energy is flowing freely after exercise. New York city public schools have Tai Chi classes, which show students are doing better academically in addition to more emotionally balanced. Click [here](#) for a TV news report.

Tai Chi actually can be very challenging to learn especially remembering the sequencing. But kids have advantage over adults because they have better memory and they can learn it quickly. There are hundreds of Tai Chi style/forms to choose from. Once a kid develops a genuine interest in this art, she can continue with the study and the learning experience and knowledge can be carried on throughout her life if so desired. Nothing will be wasted.

Of course, Tai Chi is good not just for obese kids. It is ideal for any kid to develop a stronger mind and body, and self-discipline. [Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei](#), one of the top Ten martial arts masters in China, thinks it is very important for kids to study Tai Chi when they are young. He says that Tai Chi helps to form a healthy lifestyle for life in addition to build a strong body. He takes extra time to promote Tai Chi among children.

So, what are you waiting for?

- **Parents**, call your local Tai Chi instructors and find out the best schedule/program for your child. If you live in a remote area without any access to Tai Chi classes, you can purchase teaching DVDs online. Most of the DVDs have step-by-step instructions along with a follow-me demonstration. Physican Dr. Paul Lam has created an easy to learn and fun to play routin for kids. You can see an introduction via a [link](#) here.
- **Instructors**, reach out to local school, church, boy scout/girl scout, or youth group, and

offer them a demo or a free try-out class. Based on the statistics, most obese children live in an more improvised environment. If you can afford time-wise, you should volunteer teaching a free program at a community center in a low income area to share the benefit of Tai Chi.

- **Health care practitioners**, encourage your young patients to take Tai Chi classes.
- In life, especially in the western culture, we are reluctant to confront criticisms dealing with personal appearance. Even a remote reference to someone else's appearance can be interpreted as prejudicial, abusive, inconsiderate or worst. Commenting on people's weight is especially true, and especially it is to someone we love. But obesity has become such a problem for many people now that it really warrants an examination on how we must address it. Let's have our children try Tai Chi. Together, we will be able to get our youngsters in shape.

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**Violet Li**

Tai Chi Examiner