

Ditch the treadmill and try Tai Chi

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Tai Chi class instructed by Sifu David Richie at 2015 Tai Chi Gala

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It was shocking when Survey Monkey Founder and CEO David Goldberg died on May 1. This generous Internet entrepreneur who was a mentor to many is greatly missed. President Barak Obama sent a tribute saying, “David Goldberg embodied the definition of a real leader - someone who was always looking for ways to empower others.” David was only 47-years old. More alarming was how he actually died.

David and his wife, Facebook Executive Sheryl Sandberg, were vacationing in Mexico with family and friends. One night, he exercised on a [treadmill](#), lost [balance](#), and hit his head on something hard. Excessive bleeding caused his death. Even though what prompted David to fall was unknown and there were speculations that he might have had a heart arrhythmia, treadmills have been considered the riskiest workout machine. A federal agency announced that there were 62,700 reported injured in 2014 from all exercise equipment – a category that includes swimming pools, golf clubs, trampolines,

weights, elliptical machines, treadmills, and others. Treadmills alone sent 24,400 people to medical emergency rooms. In other words, treadmills are responsible for more than one third of equipment-related injuries. Many people I know of have had experience of being thrown off by a treadmill with a sprained ankle or skin abrasion. A student of mine had broken bones from a fall from a treadmill.

Undoubtedly treadmills provide health benefits and can substitute for outdoor [walking](#), jogging, and running. But given the risk, it may be worthwhile to rethink exercise options.

A 2006 study by Harvard Medical School showed that [Tai Chi](#) (Taiji) provided more health benefits than brisk walking in random-control-trial research. The results showed a significant improvement in oxygen consumption in the Tai Chi group. This group also showed more improvement in limb strength, balance, and flexibility just in three months of practice.

In any Tai Chi form, the footwork of twisted steps or cat walking steps counts more than half of the movements. Based on research, twisted steps are a much more efficient way to build leg muscles than brisk walking. According to a University of California-Irvine's study, with the same amount training time, the group practiced Tai Chi twisted steps gained substantial more leg muscle mass than the power-walking group. **The rectus femoris muscle (or the front thigh muscle) of the twisted step group increased more than 3 times of the fast walkers!!!**

In an article on Cat Walking Steps, Sifu [Ted Knecht](#) of Cleveland, Ohio and Dr. Mei Ying Sheng pointed out other benefits of the Tai Chi steps. First, they promote blood circulation to the lower extremities of the body. Cat Walking requires body turning and results in stretching and strengthening the waist and abdominal muscles. Furthermore, Tai Chi walks are slow and the practitioners' heartbeat will decrease that contribute to longevity.

Some people may argue that even though walking on treadmill is not as efficient as Tai Chi walking, you can multi-tasking while on a treadmill, i.e. watching TV, reading, or talking on a cell phone. However, safety experts strongly caution people against these behaviors that can cause people to be thrown off a treadmill.

With so many compelling reasons, ditch the treadmill and give Tai Chi a try.

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