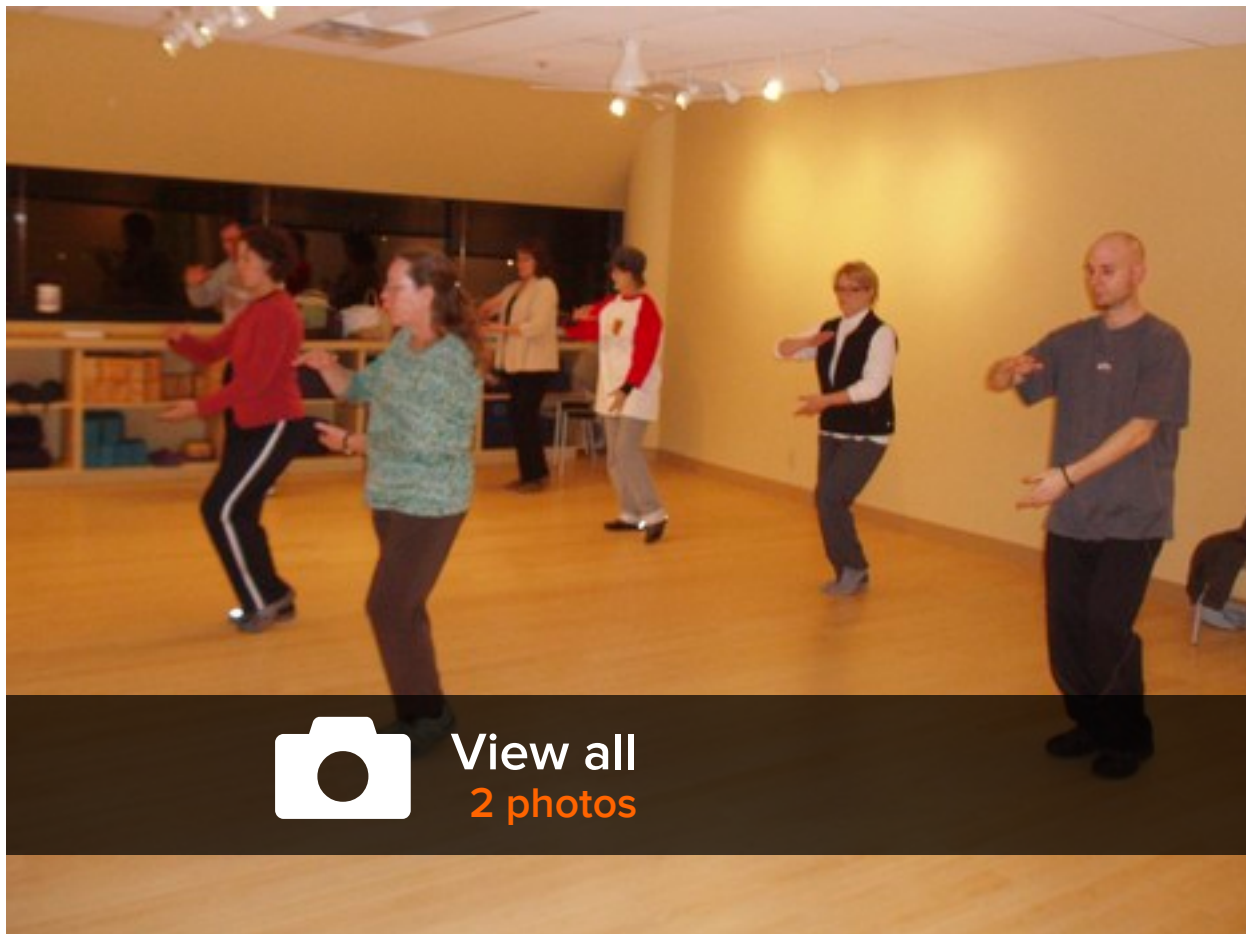


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Dr. Lijun Ma uses Tai Chi to help patients with chronic diseases

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Dr. Ma's students

Dr. Ma

Richard Fitzgerald has Parkinson's Disease (PD) and an artificial knee. Last Fall, he took two six-week sessions of [Tai Chi](#) at the [Vanderbilt Center for Integrative Health](#) and hoped to slow the progression of his disease, particularly as it relates to his balance. After the training, he reported that even his personal trainer commented that she had seen an improvement in his posture and gait. Richard was also very pleased to see how Tai Chi benefits his every day activity.

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Dr. Ma

Actually, Richard's result was not unique. According to instructor Dr. Li-Jun Ma, he witnesses patients' conditions improve after Tai Chi practice all the time.

Li-Jun Ma, M.D., Ph. D, and Research Associate Professor at the [Vanderbilt University Medical Center](#), was born in Henan, China. He started his martial arts training at age 7. He practiced Tai Chi in the morning and Shaolin in the evening. He was diligent and never stopped practicing. In college, he studied medicine and learned both western medicine as well as traditional Chinese medicine and graduated *summa cum laude*. Additionally, he won the first place in the university's Tai Chi tournament. But his interest was not in being a doctor and making money. He wanted to achieve a greater good for humanity. With that, he went back to school and got a Ph.D. in nephrology from the prestigious [Beijing University](#) in 1994. Nephrology is a branch of medicine that deals with the physiology and diseases of the kidneys. According Chinese medicine and Tai Chi, kidneys are the most important organ and are in charge of the cultivation and storage of the life force Qi. They regulate the immune system and affect all health-related issues. In 1995, Dr. Ma came to [Vanderbilt University's Medical School](#) -- ranked 15th best medical school in the nation -- to continue his pursuit for improving human health by doing advanced research in kidneys.

Outside of his research career, Dr. Ma kept up with his Tai Chi practice and won the gold medal for Tai Chi 24-Form and the silver medal for Tai Chi Sword 32-Form in the Chicago Wushu Tournament in 1999. At the encouragement of others, he started teaching Tai Chi at different venues in Nashville and is the organizer of the annual Nashville World Tai Chi & [Qigong](#) Day.

Vanderbilt University is well-known for its innovative approach to advanced medicine. Established in

2006, Vanderbilt Center for Integrative Health embraces an approach called the Wheel of Health that includes emotional health, movement & exercise, nutrition, life meaning & purpose, health behavior, mind-body connection, and relationships with its goal in treating the whole person. In 2009, Vanderbilt University co-hosted the World Tai Chi Symposium, which turned out to be a huge success. Immediately after that, the Center launched a Tai Chi class, and Dr. Ma was invited to teach there.

The Tai Chi program at the Center was designated for patients. According to Dr. Ma, most students suffer from chronic pain, fibromyalgia, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, PD, chronic cardiovascular diseases, cancer, stroke, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Alzheimer's disease, and other chronic diseases. The Tai Chi program has been well received. It now expands to four classes per week with an addition of Qigong class.

When asked what is the difference in teaching the general public versus patients, Dr. Ma said that first he has to modify the curriculum to be more therapeutic and not focusing on movements or movement sequencing. Secondly, he has to be more patient and not expect the same progression as his other classes. But it has been extremely rewarding to him to find out that his students are benefiting from Tai Chi practice.

In the past two years, Dr. Ma said that he was also deeply touched by humanity and love when he saw that a caring wife registered her husband for the class, another husband brought his Fibromyalgia-stricken wife to the class, a loving grandma took her ADHA granddaughter to the program, and a medical doctor brought his mom to the class.

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