

Tai Chi: a biopsychosocial approach to health

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Merriam-Webster dictionary defines biopsychosocial (BPS) as of, relating to, or concerned with the biological, psychological, and social aspects of health in contrast to the strictly biomedical aspects of disease. The theory was developed by [George L. Engel](#) (1913-1999) and [John Romano](#) (1904-1994) for decades, and first published by George Engel in 1977. While traditional biomedical models focus on pathophysiology and other biological approaches to disease, the biopsychosocial approach emphasizes the importance of understanding human health and illnesses from other aspects like biological, psychological, and social factors and their complex interactions.



Dr. Peter Wayne

[Tai Chi](#) (Taiji) is an ancient Chinese healing art as well as a martial art. Its philosophical root was originated from the [Book of Changes \(I Ching or Yi Jing\)](#). It was designed based on Traditional Chinese Medicine especially the [meridian systems](#). In [The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi](#), Professor [Peter Wayne](#), argued why Tai Chi is beneficial to the heart, the lung, the bone, the muscles, the nerves, the immune system, and the mind from various perspectives of Tai Chi fundamentals, Traditional Chinese medicine theory, and Western medicine logics. He further cited biomedical studies

conducted by prominent research institutes around the world as evidence.

There are many Tai Chi styles, and forms. Some are long, and complicated while others are short, and simplified. According to Dr. Wayne, they all can produce great health benefits as long as they include eight active ingredients:

- 1 Awareness, including mindfulness and focused attention. The key is the slow and deliberate movements, and attention to body alignment, sensation, and breathing.
- 2 Intention or Yi in Chinese, including belief and expectation. The visualization or imagery plays an important role in providing therapeutic, and physiological effects.
- 3 Structural Integration, including the dynamic form, and function. Enhanced integration within and between multiple structural and physiological systems is essential.
- 4 Active Relaxation. Tai Chi's flowing motion helps shift the body, and the mind into deep relaxation. It has been described as [meditation](#) in motion.
- 5 Strengthening and Flexibility. Tai Chi's slow body weight shifting, flexed stances, and dynamic stretching can help build strength, stability, and flexibility.
- 6 Natural, and Freer Breathing. Tai Chi breathing helps regulate the nervous system, improves the mood, moves Qi (life energy), and balances Qi.
- 7 Social Support. The interaction with teachers and fellow students is also an important therapeutic factor.
- 8 Embodied Spirituality, including philosophy and ritual. Dr. Wayne thinks that Tai Chi creates a practical framework by practicing living with a holistic, Eastern philosophy that can integrate body, mind, and spirit.

Aside from being influenced by *Book of Changes*, Tai Chi inherited the philosophical outlook of Confucianism, Buddhism (or Zen), and Daoism (or Taoism). To many, Tai Chi is not simply a healing art or martial art; it is a way to cultivate one's value system, and to develop a better attitude toward nature, relationship, and everyday life. Dale Napier's [Tai Chi in Your Life](#) provides many examples of how Tai Chi principles can be applied to daily tasks. Dr. Wayne also taught how to integrate Tai Chi into everyday life in his book. He introduced Tai Chi for Two, how to use Tai Chi in cross-training for the betterment of other sports (i.e. Tennis, Golf, and Skiing), on-the-job Tai Chi as an effective corporate wellness program, enhancing creativity with Tai Chi practice, and lifelong learning of Tai Chi to enrich one's life.

Since Tai Chi serves multi health functions, Dr. Wayne considered Tai Chi a biopsychosocial approach to disease prevention, and illness rehabilitation.

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