

Tai Chi and multimorbidity

January 8, 2016

2:44 PM MST



The positive effects of Tai Chi and Qigong on various diseases

Violet Li

In 2015, British Journal of Sports Medicine (BJSM) published a systematic review and meta-analysis about the effect of [Tai Chi](#) on four chronic conditions. The results demonstrated a favorable effect of Tai Chi (Taiji) to improve physical performance and showed that individuals with different chronic conditions like cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart failure, and osteoarthritis could practice Tai Chi.

Led by Yi-Wen Chen, PhD Candidate at [University of British Columbia](#), Canada, this review searched related scientific studies in four major medical databases (MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL, and SPORTDiscus), then applied a stringent set of criteria including whether a study used a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in the research to select the data. Chen and others further employed meta-analysis to the selected data and discovered that Tai Chi improved physical performance outcomes. In those selected research, the participants who practiced Tai Chi had significant improvement in the 6-minute walking distance test (6MWD) and better knee extension strength in the four targeted chronic conditions:



cancer, osteoarthritis, heart failure, and COPD. Additionally, the researchers also found out that Tai Chi improved disease-specific symptoms of pain and stiffness in patients suffered from osteoarthritis.

Multimorbidity, the coexistence of 2 or more chronic conditions, has become prevalent among older adults. In a [study](#) published by Oxford University Press in 2013 examined nearly 31 million Medicare beneficiaries in the U.S.A. for 15 prevalent chronic conditions and found a total of 67% had multimorbidity. Multimorbidity increased with age, from 50% for persons under age 65 years to 62% for those aged 65–74 years and 81.5% for those aged 85 and older. [A Primary \(Care\) Practices Research Network Report \(PPRNet\)](#) shows that multimorbidity is not just a problem of older adults. 10% of people aged 30-40 already have 2 or more chronic diseases. In the same PPRNet report, it shows the top three chronic diseases are hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and depression.

The BJSM study is focused on the physical capability of patients. It did not address how Tai Chi can help improving the biomedical indices in patients, i.e. reduction of hypertension, relief of stress, and increase in breathing capacity. One 2013 medical research review reported statistically significant effects in favor of Tai Chi compared to routine care for a combined effectiveness outcome in lowering blood pressure. Harvard medical school believes that Tai Chi which combines aerobic activity, coordination of breathing, and cognitive techniques can not only alleviate the physical inactivity of people with COPD but also can reduce their symptoms of dyspnea, anxiety, and depression. A 2015 study in Singapore showed that Tai Chi could have a positive improvement in people with subsyndromal depression (SSD) and subsyndromal anxiety (SSA). A 2013 study in Taiwan showed that Tai Chi could have a significant and positive effect on blood pressure and lipid levels.

In the past few years, this column has reported the positive effects of Tai Chi and [Qigong](#) on various diseases. With the overwhelming evidence before us, it is a no brainer to recognize that Tai Chi is extremely helpful for people with multimorbidity. Unlike medicines, Tai Chi can help people improving multiple chronic diseases all at once not just with physical performance but also biomedical functionalities without side effects. So how much you would pay for one little pill call Tai Chi/Qigong for all the health benefits?

SUGGESTED LINKS

- **Shawn and Heather are saving us big money through Tai Chi & Qigong**
- **A new hope for Parkinson's Disease patients: Tai Chi**
- **A simple Tai Chi routine eases Arthritis pain**
- **Tai Chi helps Fibromyalgia patients**
- **A top doc recommends Tai Chi for pain relief**



Violet Li

Tai Chi Examiner

© 2006-2015 AXS Digital Group LLC d/b/a Examiner.com