

# Tai Chi reduces chronic pains and more

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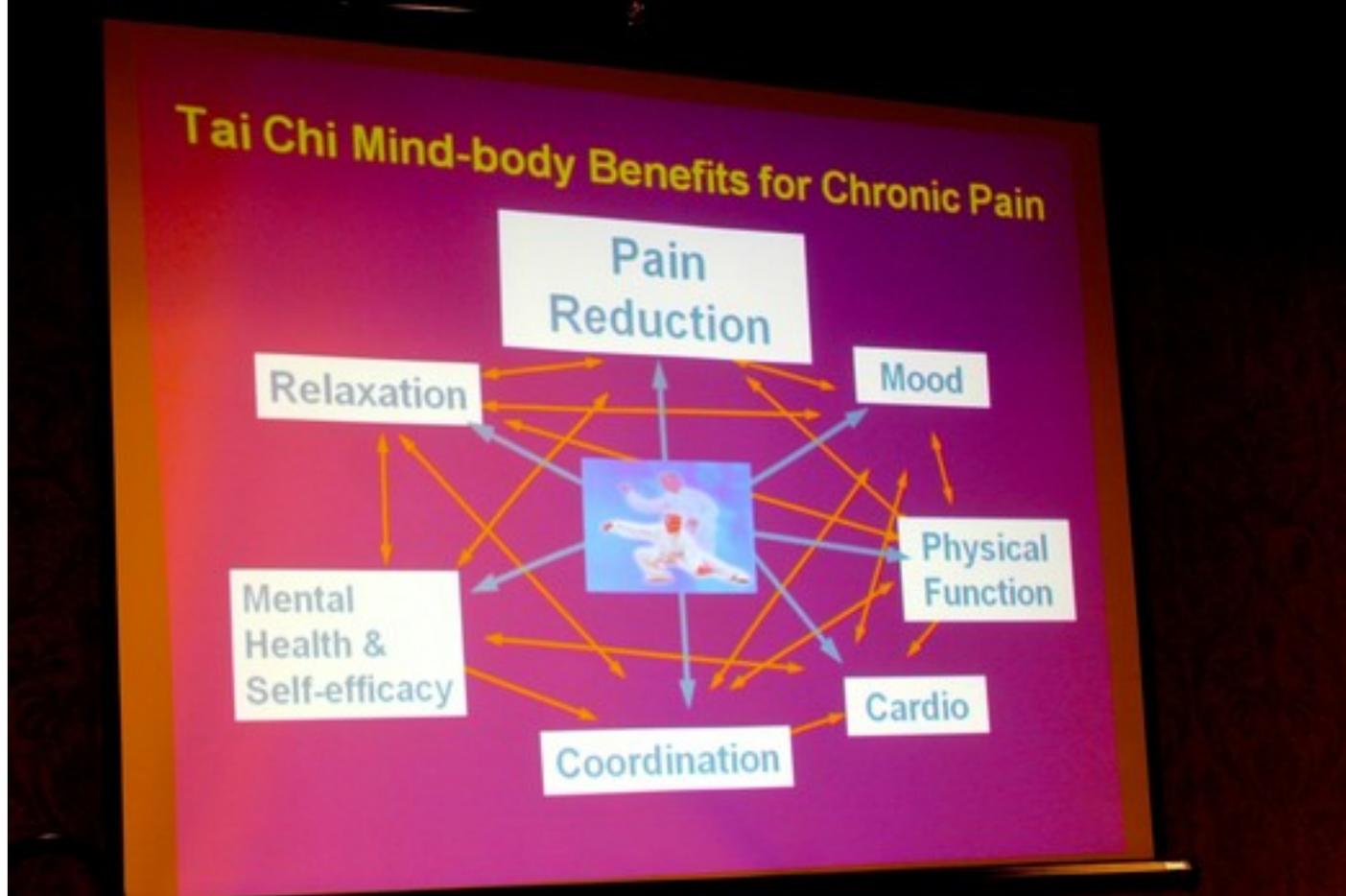
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Dr. Chenchen Wang (middle) accepted Certification of Appreciation from Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei (left) and Simu Lili Lu (right).

Violet Li

Dr. Chenchen Wang is well known in the international clinical research community. Her research “A randomized trial of [Tai Chi](#) (Taiji) for [fibromyalgia](#)” was published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2010, which was then widely reported by major media.



*Violet Li*

Born in Anhui Province, China, Dr. Chenchen Wang was born into a scholarly family. Her mother was one of few female doctors who practiced Western medicine in China during the middle of the last century. Influenced by her mother, she became a doctor herself. To advance her knowledge, she went to Canada and earned a Ph.D. degree in rheumatology and clinical epidemiology at McGill University, Montreal in 1999. In 2000 she was hired as a research professor by the medical school of Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts. She also serves as Director of the Center for Integrative Medicine Program at Tufts Medical Center. Her research focuses on clinical and epidemiological studies of complementary and alternative medicine and their applications to treatments in chronic pain conditions, particularly osteoarthritis, [rheumatoid arthritis](#), fibromyalgia, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Currently, Dr. Wang serves as a principal investigator on several NIH-funded clinical trials evaluating Tai Chi mind-body therapies on chronic conditions and publishes extensively.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) is the Federal Government's lead agency for scientific research on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). They are 1 of the 27 institutes and centers that make up the [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#) within the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#).

The highly distinguished NCCAM council members—composed of 18 physicians, scientists, complementary health practitioners, and members of the public—are appointed by the Secretary of Health and Human Services and represent a broad range of science and practice. June last year, Dr. Chenchen Wang was appointed as a council member.

In addition to teaching and research, Professor Wang is constantly invited to give speeches. In June

she attended the International Acupuncture and Neurology conference in Beijing to address the topic of Tai Chi and health. She flew to Las Vegas right after the Beijing convention to participate in International *Tai Chi Light* Workshops (June 16- 20) hosted by Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei. Grandmaster Chen is the 11th Generation of Chen Style Tai Chi family and Lineage Holder and one of the Top Ten martial artists in China. *Tai Chi Light* workshops were for his disciples and senior instructors. Sixty senior instructors and practitioners from China, USA, UK, Peru, and Iran attended the training. Dr. Chenchen Wang gave a keynote to explain Tai Chi's health benefits for patients of [arthritis](#), osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic back pain, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Professor Wang cited data from World Health Organization (WHO) of United Nations that twenty percent of the world's population has been suffering from some kind of chronic pain or one out of five people who endures a pain. There are muscle pains, joint pains, and nerve pains. Some of the pains result from surgeries or injuries. In 2011, U.S. spent \$635 billions in treating pain. Over 4 million Americans a year are prescribed long-acting opioids or the psychoactive chemicals that resemble [morphine](#) or other [opiates](#) in their pharmacological effects.

Tufts University provides Dr. Wang with a well equipped "therapy room" to treat patients. She has interviewed many tai chi teachers and currently works with three senior Tai Chi instructors. They closely follow her teaching method and teach patients Tai Chi; in other words, they use Tai Chi as an intervention method to treat pain. The patients' conditions improved significantly after a few weeks of "Tai Chi treatment" and on some occasions, no longer needed medication.

Professor Wang applies rigid research standards of randomized controlled trials (RCT) to most of her studies by adopting a control group. For her famous fibromyalgia research, in addition to a Tai Chi group, another group of patients with the same characteristics was assigned to stretching exercise. Each group had a sixty-minute training session twice a week. Twelve weeks later, the Tai Chi group patients had significant improvement in pain reduction compared to the stretching group. They also enjoyed better sleep quality, with improvements in gait and balance. Mary was 59 and suffered from fibromyalgia and there were many tender points on her body from head to toe. She suffered from constant headache and she had to put her hands over her head to feel better. She had a hard time to sleep. She could not walk half a mile. There was no pleasure in life for her. Due to side effects, Mary rejected medication. She tried physical therapy, swimming, and other approaches before enrolling in the Tai Chi study. Tai Chi helped her problem drastically so she continued to practice Tai Chi five times a week. New York Times interviewed her six months after the research. Her fibromyalgia areas no longer hurt. She gained more flexibility, range of motion, and strength. Her energy level was up. She did not have headaches in the past two months. Her anxiety problem was gone. She could sleep well between 6 to 7 hours each night. She had more positive attitude toward life.

Similar results were also found in clinical studies of patients suffering from arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, and chronic back pain. Dr. Wang emphasized that the health benefit was the same

regardless the race, color, sex, and age of patients. Recently her research team did a small trial with veterans of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars, who suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). After a sixty-minute Tai Chi class per week for four weeks, veterans reported the pain was gone and the depression abated.

During her speech, Dr. Wang also mentioned the results of research by other scientists that confirmed that Tai Chi practice can improve cardiovascular health, increase muscle strength, body balance, and physical functions regardless of Tai Chi style.

Grandmaster Chen explained that his ancestor Chen Wangting infused the Chinese meridian system when he created Tai Chi Chuan (boxing). Grandmaster Chen collaborated with Dr. Shin Lin, Professor of University of California-Irvine, on research focusing Tai Chi and health as well as the meridian system for eight years (2002-2009). Through the research, Dr. Lin declared that Tai Chi is a holistic mind-body exercise that can improve health greatly. Chen Zhenglei further stated that Chen Zhenglei Tai Chi Cultural Center has participated in clinical trials with China Henan Medical University, Northeast Normal University, and Zhengzhou Hospital. The preliminary results showed Chen style Tai Chi is effective in improving health and sicknesses.

After Dr. Wang's speech, many Tai Chi instructors shared success stories of how Tai Chi helps their students with various illnesses. Dr. Wang was also approached by many workshop attendees with questions long after the program ended. Grandmaster Chen presented a certification of appreciation to Dr. Chenchen Wang for her outstanding contribution to Tai Chi research.

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