

# Taichi improves old adults' immunity, sleep quality and many other health issues

June 6, 2010

10:17 PM MST



Dr. Michael Irwin

In certain circumstances, it has been shown that [Taichi](#) has a similar effect as vaccination to boost immune systems for older adults. [Michael R. Irwin, MD](#) and professor of University of California, Los Angeles, and other scientists have conducted research showing that [Tai Chi Chih](#), a modified Taichi form, provided the practitioners the same benefit as people who got vaccine to prevent Shingles, an immune system deficiency disease. In a related study, people who practiced [Tai Chi Chih](#) were also vaccinated and their immunity levels were doubled. There are additional health benefits that the practitioners gained by practicing Tai Chi Chih which included depression abatement, physical function enhancement, body pain reduction, vitality growth, mental health improvement, and sleep quality betterment.

Dr. Michael Irwin was the recipient of the Scientist of the Year Award by the recent World Congress on Qigong and the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). He presented the aforementioned research results during the Scientific Symposium during the World Congress held in San Francisco in late April.

[Tai Chi Chih](#) is a modified Taichi form. It consists of 19 movements and one pose with minimal aerobic impact. It was developed by [Justin Stone](#) in 1974. It adheres to most of the Taichi fundamentals, i.e.

clearly identifying Solid and Empty, breathe slowly, Consistent and constant body weight shifting, proper body alignment, practicing with Intent, and moving arms/hands through “thick” air, and totally relaxing the body. It focuses more on the [Chi Gong](#) aspect of Taichi.

Dr. Irwin, Director of the UCLA [Cousins Center for Psychoneuroimmunology](#) and Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences, along with other scientists did several studies from 2001 to 2005 and discovered the amazing health benefits that Tai Chi Chih generates for the older adults.



Dr. Irwin and Dr. Lin at the World Congress

In the study of [Shingles Immunity and Health Functioning in the Elderly: Tai Chi Chih as a Behavioral Treatment](#), Dr. Irwin and other researcher scientists worked with 112 healthy adults aged 59 to 86 with mean age of 70, who were divided into two groups: one group was taught Tai Chi Chih while the other group was provided health related info. The Taichi session and the health info session were 40 minutes each and three times each week. After 16 weeks, the health education group was given vaccination to boost the immunity to prevent Shingle development. At the 25th week, it was found that the immunity level of both groups elevated. Surprisingly, Taichi group’s immunity index was slightly higher than the other group inoculated with vaccine. According to Dr. Irwin, this result is extremely encouraging. It shows that Taichi alone can provide the same health benefit if not more as immunization and it is good for many seniors since some of them are not suitable for vaccination. To further the understanding of the relationship of Taichi practice and vaccination, the researchers also vaccinated some of the Taichi Practitioners. The results showed that their immunity level was twice as high as the Taichi group who did not get the vaccination and the Health Education group who only got vaccination. It shows that there is no interfering effect from Taichi practice on vaccination; they can work together to provide a greater benefit.

It was extremely remarkable to discover that the average VZV-RCF level or immunity index of Shingles prevention of the older adults who practiced Tai Chi Chih and got vaccination is **comparable with the mean level of healthy adults of 30 years younger**.

Another study [Tai Chi Chih acutely decreases sympathetic nervous system activity in older adults](#) of 2005 also utilized Tai Chi Chih as a method of intervention. The researchers designed a slow movement exercise, which is similar to Tai Chi Chih with little aerobic impact for a control group to learn. In comparison with the Health Education group, the group practiced Tai Chi Chih has significant changes in depression reduction, physical function progressing, body pain

reduction, vitality boosting, and overall mental health improvement.

*Improving sleep quality in older adults with moderate sleep complaints: A randomized controlled trial of Tai Chi Chih* also showed that the Tai Chi Chih practitioners were also able to improve their sleep quality and sleep efficiency, lengthen sleep duration, and reduce sleep disturbance. **The magnitude of benefit achieved with Tai Chi Chih is comparable to pharmacologic treatments.**



Tai Chi Chih practice at YMCA Women's Wellness Weekend

**For more info:** you can find out more details on these research studies by clicking on the links: [\*Shingles Immunity and Health Functioning in the Elderly: Tai Chi Chih as a Behavioral Treatment\*](#), [\*Tai Chi Chih acutely decreases sympathetic nervous system activity in older adults\*](#), [\*Improving sleep quality in older adults with moderate sleep complaints: A randomized controlled trial of Tai Chi Chih\*](#).



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