

# Tai Chi: Self-Defense Against Arthritis

Research shows the Arthritis Foundation's program reduces pain and stiffness.

TAI CHI MAY BE ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF against the pain, stiffness, fatigue, muscle weakness and disability associated with arthritis, new research suggests.

In the largest study of the Arthritis Foundation's Tai Chi Program, researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) assigned 354 participants with self-reported arthritis to begin a twice-weekly, one-hour tai chi class, beginning either immediately or eight weeks later.

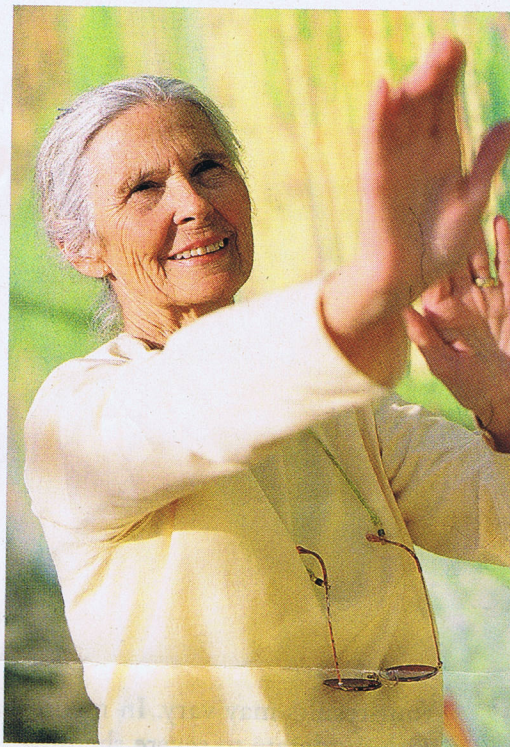
Before starting, all were evaluated for balance, lower-body strength, pain, stiffness, physical function and some psychosocial measures. Eight weeks later, both groups underwent the same evaluations. Those who had already started classes showed moderate improvements in pain, fatigue, stiffness and the ability to do daily activities. They also had an increased sense of well-being, says lead author Leigh Callahan, PhD, a professor in the UNC School of Medicine and a member of the university's Thurston Arthritis Research Center.

Callahan says the benefits of tai chi likely go beyond those directly measured by the study. "It gives people a certain awareness of their body and where [it is in the surrounding] space," she says.

Although study participants noticed improvement in arthritis symptoms from just two weekly, one-hour sessions, Callahan suspects practicing tai chi more frequently could lead to additional benefits, and that continued practice is needed to sustain the benefits. A follow-up study under way might help confirm that.

"With any exercise program you get into shape, and if you stop doing it you pretty quickly lose what you gained," she says. "The idea is that you hope people will continue to be physically active."

She believes the study subjects can and will continue. "All of our participants loved it," she says. —MARY ANNE DUNKIN



## Join In

The Arthritis Foundation's Tai Chi Program is designed for people with arthritis and uses Sun style Tai Chi. To find a class in your area, contact your local office ([www.arthritis.org/chaptermap](http://www.arthritis.org/chaptermap)). A DVD also is available at [www.afstore.org](http://www.afstore.org).