



# Health & Nutrition Letter

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expected,” commented John Klippel, MD, president of the Arthritis Foundation. He suggested that more Americans may be hobbled by arthritis in part because of the aging Baby Boomer population—plus the fact that so many aging Boomers are overweight or obese. In the latest CDC survey, people who were obese or physically inactive were most likely to report arthritis-related activity limitations.

## Glucosamine & Chondroitin Flunk

The CDC report came on the heels of a landmark meta-analysis of 10 placebo-controlled trials of **glucosamine** and **chondroitin** that researchers said should “close the book” on whether those popular supplements actually help arthritis sufferers. Peter Juni, MD, of the University of Bern in Switzerland, and colleagues concluded, “Our findings indicate that glucosamine, chondroitin and their combination do not result in a relevant reduction of joint pain nor affect joint-space narrowing compared with placebo.... We believe it unlikely that future trials will show a clinically relevant benefit of any of the evaluated preparations.”

## Tai Chi Eases Fibromyalgia

The ancient Chinese martial art of tai chi may be the latest weapon against the chronic pain of fibromyalgia. A recent clinical trial at Tufts New England Medical Center found that patients receiving training in tai chi showed significantly greater improvement in measurements of pain, fatigue, physical function, sleeplessness and depression than those in a control group.

Chenchen Wang, MD, MSc, and her colleagues split 66 fibromyalgia sufferers into two groups for the 12-week trial. Half attended twice-weekly, 60-minute classes with Boston tai chi master Ramel Rones and got his DVD to practice with for 20 minutes at home on the other days. The rest did stretching exercises and got wellness education. All were assessed using the standardized Fibromyalgia Impact Questionnaire (FIQ) at the end of the trial and again 12 weeks after the study was over.

“The 33 in the tai chi group had clinically important improvements in the FIQ

total scores and quality of life,” Dr. Wang and colleagues reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. A third of patients in the tai chi group improved enough to stop taking medication for their condition, compared to one-sixth of the control group. Even after three months, benefits persisted for the tai chi participants.

Although originally developed as a martial art, tai chi today is primarily taught as a gentle, low-impact exercise. “Tai chi has multiple components—physical, psychological, social and spiritual,” said Dr. Wang. “It combines meditation with slow, gentle, graceful movements, as well as deep breathing and relaxation to move vital energy (called *qi* by the Chinese) throughout the body.”

**TO LEARN MORE:** *New England Journal of Medicine*, August 19, 2010; abstract at <[www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa0912611](http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMoa0912611)>. *Sunrise Tai Chi: Simplified Tai Chi for Health & Longevity* (YMAA Publication Center, \$16.95) by Ramel Rones, one of the authors of the study, and David Silver; available at <[www.tuftsbooks.com](http://www.tuftsbooks.com)>. ♦