



Information sheet: Tai Chi

What is Tai Chi?

Tai chi, also known as tai chi chuan, is believed to have originated in China in the 13th century, as a form of martial art. Now widely practised throughout the world, tai chi combines relaxation, deep breathing and postures that gently flow into one another. It is a very slow and graceful discipline, and is kind on the joints and muscles.

There are different types of tai chi – including yang, chen and wu – with the main difference being the speed of moving from one posture to the other, and how the different postures are held.

What does the therapy do?

Tai chi has many potential health benefits, from helping to reduce stress, to improving muscle strength in the legs (many of the movements are executed with a bend at the knees). As a very gentle form of exercise, it can be particularly beneficial for older people, helping to improve posture and joint mobility. Studies have also indicated that it can improve balance and potentially prevent falls among older people.

What are the training standards?

Unlike other complementary therapies, such as massage and reiki, tai chi does not sit on a regulated qualification framework (RQF). Instructors are typically graded according to their level of experience, with those new to

the discipline learning from someone who has many years of experience in practising Chinese internal martial arts.

Is Tai Chi regulated?

Tai chi instructors are not regulated by statute. However, they can volunteer to belong to an association that represents health and wellbeing practitioners and instructors, if they meet relevant criteria.

How do I find a Tai Chi instructor?

It is important to find a tai chi instructor who is certified and insured, and who belongs to a respected professional association, so that you can be confident that they meet industry standards and abide by a strict code of conduct. The Federation of Holistic Therapists ([FHT](#)) is the UK's largest professional association for complementary therapists in the UK. The NHS also suggest looking for tai chi classes on the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain [website](#).

Are there any safety concerns?

No, if carried out by a professional therapist. Tai chi should always be used alongside standard medical care and not as an alternative. Some cautions and considerations may apply – for example, if you are pregnant or have recently had surgery - which your therapist will discuss with you before you start practicing.

Is there an evidence base?

Research into the health benefits of tai chi is not as readily available as it is for more conventional medical treatments. However, there are a growing number of studies that suggest tai chi can help to improve balance, prevent falls in those at risk, and improve general physical function and wellbeing. For research abstracts, visit:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/>