

Complementary therapy & Tremor: Tai Chi

What is Tai Chi?

Tai (or t'ai) Chi is an ancient martial art originating in the Far East. Based on 6,000 year old Chinese teachings, Tai Chi is both an exercise and fighting system, but which is now practiced as a defense against the stresses and strains of daily life.

Combining movement, meditation and breath regulation, Tai Chi is a series of coordinated, rhythmical exercises performed in a slow, relaxed manner that can improve and maintain health, create a sense of relaxation, improve balance and posture, and enhance the flow of energy (or Chi) in the body.

Seemingly effortless and one continuous movement, Tai Chi actually consists of 108 intricate exercise sequences which also help improve mental concentration. Those who practice Tai Chi believe that the mind is the most important tool in achieving excellence in all areas of life, including health. So the ability to focus the mind and keep it interested and involved is essential to change, correct and heal oneself.

In China it is estimated that 200 million people practice Tai Chi every day!

How can it help people with Essential Tremor and their family / career?

Unlike most sports or exercises, Tai Chi does not rely on strength, force or speed, which makes it ideal for everyone, whether young or old, strong or weak. Even a small amount of practice can bring benefits in health and fitness, enabling the mind and body to relax, and help cope with the challenges of living with tremor. Because Tai Chi enhances balance and body awareness, it may significantly reduce the risk of falls and improve posture.

As with all physical therapies, some people with Essential Tremor may find some of the activities challenging, but techniques may be adapted to suit individuals – your teacher should be able to advise on this.

Unlike yoga, the benefits of Tai Chi are found in the movement, not in holding the posture.

What should I expect if I join a class?

Tai Chi classes are relaxing and non-competitive, and comprise four basic elements:

Dao Yin – easy-to-learn exercises and gentle stretches to warm up the body and help remove toxins from joints and ligaments

Chi Kung - exercises with synchronised breathing to help strengthen and balance the body's energy whilst aiding concentration and reducing stress

Tai Chi Chuan – a series of movements performed in a slow, relaxed and flowing way, also known as the Form. Lasting from 5 to 20 minutes, the Form is a kind of moving meditation. Each movement can be practiced at increasing levels of depth as the student develops

Push-hands practice (certain classes only) – these are partner exercises designed to help the student develop an understanding of the underlying philosophy of Tai Chi as a martial art.

You will need to wear clothing that you find easy to move and stretch in, but no specialist equipment is required.

Tai Chi should be taught by a qualified teacher and not learned from a book.

Always make sure that your teacher knows that you have Essential Tremor.