

MOVING MEDITATIONS – TAI CHI & QIGONG POCKET GUIDE

FAST FACTS

- It is estimated that 2.5 million people in the United States regularly practice Tai Chi.
- Tai Chi is a practice that has grown out of the ancient spiritual healing tradition of Qigong, which is suspected to be more than 2,500 years old.
- Some forms of Tai Chi are considered martial arts training, and when the speed of the movements is increased, they can be used as defensive moves during battle.

WHAT ARE TAI CHI AND QIGONG?

Tai Chi and Qigong are moving meditations that build balance, coordination, strength, and functional capacity. Both practices combine the use of slow and deliberate movements with meditation and breathing practice. These practices were not developed to increase heart rates or burn calories; nevertheless, their impact on muscle control and balance are beneficial to athletes and non-athletes alike. Some research also suggests effects on metabolism.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TAI CHI AND QIGONG?

Although the practices of Tai Chi and Qigong are sometimes referred to interchangeably, Tai Chi is a practice that has grown from the Qigong tradition. Qigong, and the movements associated with the practice, was designed solely as a meditative and healing practice. The movements developed as a part of the Tai Chi tradition can be used as a martial art or applied to self-defense. Qigong can be very easy, thus it soothes the nervous system. Tai Chi is more complex, including foot movements, thus it is excellent for brain plasticity maximization. Tai Chi is often modified to be more like Qigong.

WHAT MEDICAL CONDITIONS DO TAI CHI AND QIGONG AFFECT?

Tai Chi and Qigong are used to help both physical and mental health conditions and to address symptoms related to chronic health concerns. They have been used to help with:

- Bone density
- Cardiopulmonary health
- Arthritis
- Fatigue
- Fibromyalgia
- Tension headaches
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Improve balance and stability
- Cognitive decline
- Degenerative diseases
- Chronic pain
- Parkinson's disease
- Diabetes

Is there evidence that Qigong and Tai Chi are beneficial?

A substantial amount of literature exists exploring the impacts of Qigong and Tai Chi on treating symptoms and root causes of certain conditions:

- A systematic review and meta-analysis of Tai Chi in patients with type 2 diabetes found that individuals who practiced Tai Chi for 150 minutes per week had decreased glycosylated hemoglobin (a long-term indicator of lower blood sugar levels), reduced fasting blood sugar levels, decreased body mass index, and increased patients' quality of life.¹
- A systematic review and meta-analysis of Tai Chi for patients suffering from fatigue found that Tai Chi was not only more effective than conventional therapies for decreasing fatigue (particularly in cancer patients), but was also more effective in addressing depression, vitality, and increasing the amount patients slept.²
- A systematic review and meta-analysis of six randomized control trials of patients with Parkinson's disease found that Tai Chi significantly improved balance, motor function, functional mobility, walking abilities, and step length.³

- A study of 74 patients over the age of 60 with mild cognitive decline who engaged in a Tai Chi program two times a week for 16 weeks had improvements in their cognitive functioning and were better able to perform daily activities than those in the control group.⁴
- A systematic review and meta-analysis including 499 cancer patients found that those who participated in Qigong or Tai Chi classes had increased cancer-specific quality of life, improved immune system functioning, and decreased cortisol (stress hormone) levels.⁵
- A comprehensive review of the Tai Chi and Qigong research since 1992 found that Tai Chi and Qigong were safe and effective for several conditions that have the greatest medical costs—heart disease prevention, falls prevention, and neuropsychological disorders.⁶

If you or your healthcare provider would like to explore more research on meditation's impact on a particular health concern, visit: <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/taiChi/introduction.htm>

Are there precautions, side effects, or safety concerns I should be aware of before I start Qigong and/or Tai Chi?

Tai Chi and Qigong are widely considered safe ways of addressing physical and mental symptoms; side effects are rare.

Precautions:

- Some have reported aches, pains, and soreness after engaging in Tai Chi or Qigong.
- If you are pregnant, have chronic back problems, or a hernia, please speak with your physician prior to beginning Tai Chi or Qigong practices.
- Qigong and Tai Chi can be modified for people who have challenges, pain, weakness, are post surgery, etc. Most practices can be done seated and in wheelchairs.

How often should, and how long should, one practice Qigong and/or Tai Chi? How long is each session?

How often, and for how long, you attend Qigong and/or Tai Chi classes, or practice on your own, is dependent on the reason you are seeking the help, and the type of classes you are attending. Typically, classes or an individual session with a practitioner can run anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour. Classes are usually once or twice per week. Home practice can be occasional or daily, and the practice duration can be as brief as 30 minutes. People who love these practices continue for the rest of their lives.

Do I need to attend classes or work with a certified clinician to begin Qigong and/or Tai Chi?

If you do not have a history of debilitating injuries or a chronic disease which limits your mobility, you can begin developing a Tai Chi or Qigong practice on your own.

What training/certifications do Qigong and/or Tai Chi practitioners have?

Tai Chi and Qigong practitioners are not regulated on a federal or a state level.

Currently, many independent organizations lead trainings and provide certifications to individuals who either take their courses or meet their qualifications. Although there are no official training guidelines, make sure that the certification the practitioner holds includes educational and experiential hours prior to completing certification. Before attending a class with a Qigong and/or Tai Chi practitioner, ask the practitioner for his/her qualifications and research the organization where they received their qualifications. Because Qigong and Tai Chi are generally slow and easy, you may find that a teacher or practice leader leads a safe and effective class even if they do not have a lot of training—practitioners are often inspired to share what they have learned. Always take care and be especially self-responsible.

How do I find Qigong and/or Tai Chi classes being taught near me?

Many local organizations, such as YMCAs, social services, and community centers, provide Qigong and Tai Chi classes. In addition, you may wish to consult the directories at these organizations:

Institute of Integral Qigong and Tai Chi (IIQTC):
<http://IIQTC.org/>

National Qigong Association
<http://NQA.org/>

Tai Chi for Health Institute
<https://taiChiforhealthinstitute.org/instructors/>

Supreme Chi Living
<http://www.americantaichi.net/TaiChiQigongClass.asp>

Tai Chi Foundation
<http://www.taichifoundation.org/blog/find-class>

How much will attending Qigong and/or Tai Chi classes cost me?

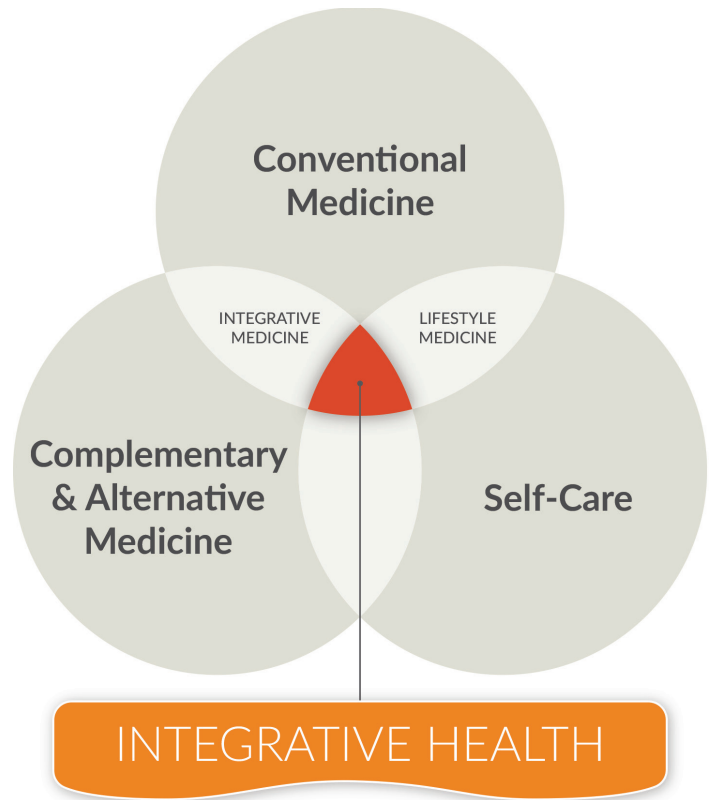
The cost of attending Qigong and/or Tai Chi classes will vary based on location, provider, and extent of services needed. Classes can range from less than twenty dollars per session at a community center to several hundreds of dollars for an individual session with a master practitioner. If you have a membership at a gym, spa, or community center, check to see if it includes free or discounted Qigong and/or Tai Chi classes that meet your needs.

Will my insurance company cover the cost?

Currently, there are very few instances in which insurance companies cover the cost of Qigong and/or Tai Chi classes. However, if your physician prescribes Qigong or Tai Chi through a physical therapist or occupational therapy program, there may be some coverage.

Should I inform my primary care physician that I am attending Qigong and/or Tai Chi classes?

Let your primary care physician and any other health care providers treating you know that you would like to include Qigong and/or Tai Chi in the tools you are using to address your medical condition or concern. Open communication can help you and your health care providers avoid complications that may arise from not openly discussing any treatments and help coordinate clinicians you employ to address your condition. In addition, be sure to let your providers know when Qigong and/or Tai Chi have a positive effect.



References:

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- 4 Siu, M.Y., & Lee, D.T.F. (2018). Effects of tai Chi on cognition and instrumental activities of daily living in community dwelling older people with mild cognitive impairment. *BMC Geriatrics*, 18(1): 37.
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- 6 Jahnke, R., Larkey L, et al. (2010). A Comprehensive Review of the Health Benefits of Qigong and Tai Chi. *The American Journal of Health Promotion*, 24(6): e1-e25.

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