



## Older adults can spruce up their exercise routine, prevent falls with Tai chi

With warmer weather right around the corner, physical activity is a great way to alleviate a case of spring fever. As everything starts to turn green and look new again, it's the perfect time to add something new to your regular physical activity routine. April 28 is *World Tai Chi Day* (pronounced tie-CHEE) and the perfect opportunity to try this low-impact activity that can help older adults improve balance and prevent falls.



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Tai chi is an ancient form of Chinese martial arts that is sometimes described as "meditation in motion." Tai chi consists of low-risk, rhythmic movements that require use of the major joints in the body. The Yang style of Tai chi incorporates the slowest movements and is easily adapted to senior participants.

Tai chi can improve flexibility, strength, muscle tone, balance and coordination. Many studies have also linked Tai chi with an improved range of motion, balance, confidence and a decreased risk of falls in senior adults. Other benefits include increased mental health, stress reduction, and reduced anxiety and depression. Structured physical activity of any kind has an added benefit of meeting new people and provides an opportunity to socialize with peers and keep motivation levels high.

Whether you are trying a new type of physical activity or continuing with an activity you enjoy, it is important to keep these tips in mind:

- **Start with small amounts of physical activity and gradually increase the time and intensity of the activity.** If you are dedicated to being active and feeling better, you will see progress quickly!
- **Listen to your body and know your limits.** People adjust to exercise differently; you can avoid a possible injury by not overworking your body.
- **Remember that it takes time to build and regain strength.** By the time a person reaches 80 years of age, they can lose up to half of the muscle strength they had when they are younger. The good news is that strength, flexibility and balance can be restored at any age.
- **It's okay to change or stop an exercise.** There are countless types of physical activity a person can participate in. If you don't find something you like right away, try something different!
- **Exercise should not be painful.** If you experience pain, immediately stop what you are doing and consult your physician

Finally, keep in mind that falls cannot be prevented by exercise alone. Talking to your physician about the medications you are taking, having your vision checked annually, making changes in your home, or having a fall risk assessment performed by a physical therapist, are great ways to help prevent falls. For more information or to find a Tai chi class in your neighborhood, call (513) 946-7820 or visit [www.fallpreventiontaskforce.org](http://www.fallpreventiontaskforce.org).