



A Comprehensive Review of Health Benefits of Qigong and Tai Chi

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Objective

Research examining psychological and physiological benefits of Qigong and Tai Chi is growing rapidly. The many practices described as Qigong or Tai Chi have similar theoretical roots, proposed mechanisms of action and expected benefits. Research trials and reviews, however, treat them as separate targets of examination. This review examines the evidence for achieving outcomes from randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of both.

Results

Seventy-seven articles met the inclusion criteria. The 9 outcome category groupings that emerged were: bone density (n=4), cardiopulmonary effects (n=19), physical function (n=16), falls and related risk factors (n=23), Quality of Life (n=17), self-efficacy (n=8), patient reported outcomes (n=13), psychological symptoms (n=27), and immune function (n=6).

Conclusion

A compelling body of research emerges when Tai Chi studies and the growing body of Qigong studies are combined. The evidence suggests that a wide range of health benefits accrue in response to these meditative movement forms, some consistently so, and some with limitations in the findings thus far. This review has identified numerous outcomes with varying levels of evidence for the efficacy for Qigong and Tai Chi, including bone health, cardiopulmonary fitness and related biomarkers, physical function, falls prevention and balance, general quality of life and patient reported outcomes, immunity, and psychological factors such as anxiety, depression and self-efficacy. A substantial number RCTs have demonstrated consistent, positive results especially when the studies are designed with limited activity for controls. When both Tai Chi and Qigong are investigated together, as two approaches to a single category of practice, meditative movement, the magnitude of the body of research is quite impressive.