

TriWest now covers Tai Chi and Qigong. The following letter that Veteran patients give their referring provider has been found to be helpful to get the referral process started:

Dear Referring Provider,

Thanks to the Mission Act, Tai Chi/Qigong is now available as an official Community Care consult with the VHA's CPRS system where local and online (telehealth) instructors are utilized the same as surgeons and specialists in the community. The consult can be found in the CRPS system then the Standard Episode of Care (SEOC) selected is Community Care Complementary Integrative Health CIH Tai Chi/Qigong.

Veterans may face difficulties when primary care providers are unfamiliar with Tai Chi/Qigong referrals.

Primary care doctors use the referral code in their system: CIH-Tai Chi/Qigong.

Referrals are authorized for 30 visits, which must be used within a year.

I would like to request an official Community Care consult through the Mission Act. I would like to request that Shannon Freeman, DAC, DCEM, Medical Tai Chi/Qigong and NPI# 1407993900, (a Doctor of Medical Tai Chi/Qigong for Veteran instructor who is in the PPMS system) be listed as my preferred provider

Please have the Office of Community Care or a Care in the Community (CITC) representative send her the consult/referral for care via HSRM. Alternatively, you can fax the consult referral to 360-366-4241. I appreciate and thank you in advance for expediting this request.

For Veterans with a history of chronic pain, PTSD and depression, any code that is found in the ICD10 coding manual, contributes to the referral for Tai Chi and Qigong sessions. Sessions are Telehealth. 30 Visits per year

Treatment Approach:

Offer Tai Chi, Qigong, and Medical Qigong sessions as appropriate for the veteran's specific medical condition. Provide individual or group sessions based on the veteran's comfort level and needs. Encourage progression from individual to group sessions when appropriate for the veteran's well-being. Allow spouses or family members to join sessions if the veteran is comfortable with their presence.

There are a number of studies of the health benefits of tai chi and qi gong.[4,8-10] Remember, as is the case with many complementary approaches, these therapies are intended to benefit overall quality of life, not necessarily as a cure for any one problem or illness.

- Tai chi increases overall well-being and improves sleep.[4]
- For tai chi, some of the strongest evidence relates to the elderly, particularly for fall prevention (it reduces falls by 43-50%).[11,12] It also helps to reduce fear of falling. Tai chi improves balance in people with a history of stroke.[13]
- Tai chi benefits mobility and balance and disease progression in people with Parkinson's disease.[14] Tai chi improves osteoarthritis pain and is recommended by the American College of Rheumatology for osteoarthritis of the hip, hand, and knee.[15] Data is limited regarding tai chi for rheumatoid arthritis[16] but promising for fibromyalgia.[17]
- Tai chi supports cardiac rehabilitation after myocardial infarction.[18,19] There is a small to medium treatment effect for improvements in BMI.[20]
- Tai chi improves cognitive function and has specifically been associated with a lower incidence of dementia in longitudinal studies.[21, 30, 32]. Research has also shown benefit in cognitive performance in Parkinson's patients engaging in tai chi [35].
- Tai chi promotes general mental well-being.[22] It reduces the prevalence and severity of depression [22] and improves mental health and quality of life in patients with cardiovascular disease.[31]
- Preliminary research shows promise for preventing and treating osteoporosis.[23]
- It can also improve glucose management and hemoglobin A1c in type 2 diabetes.[24,25]
- A recent review found tai chi shows promise for reducing fatigue.[26]
- Another review noted more research is still needed regarding tai chi and its effects on chronic pain.[27]
- A 2018 study found that tai chi is equivalent to pulmonary rehabilitation when it comes to outcomes for patients with COPD.[28]
- A 2021 study showed tai chi improved cognitive performance, motor function, and well-being in older patients during the Covid 19 pandemic [37].
- Data is less clear for the benefits for tai chi related to chronic heart failure.
- Qi gong has not been studied as extensively, but it shows promise for helping people with cancer with managing their symptoms and improving physical ability, functional ability, insomnia, depression, anxiety, and balance.[29] More research is needed.

WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR (HARMS)

Tai chi and qi gong are considered safe when used under the guidance of a skilled teacher [36]. Both have enough of an aerobic component to merit the same cautions that would apply to other aerobic activities, though they can be tailored to different people's needs.[10] Limited studies have assessed tai chi in pregnancy, but no adverse events were noted in these studies [33, 34].

TIPS ON TAI CHI AND QI GONG FROM YOUR COLLEAGUES

- Many VA facilities have live virtual or in-person classes available. If they do not, **look around for classes and teachers in your community**. Some health clubs have classes, as do many university settings. You can find a certified instructor on the [American Tai Chi and Qigong Association](http://www.americantaichi.org/) website.
- **Try taking some classes yourself**, so that you can speak with more knowledge about them to others.
- While there is less research on **other martial arts**, it is reasonable to assume that they can have similar benefits to tai chi.

RESOURCES

VA WHOLE HEALTH AND RELATED SITES

- [Evidence Map for Tai Chi:](http://www.hsrp.research.va.gov/publications/esp/taichi-REPORT.pdf)
<http://www.hsrp.research.va.gov/publications/esp/taichi-REPORT.pdf>
 - Compilation of systematic review data by VA Health Services Research and Development (HSR&D)
- [Whole Health Veteran Handouts:](https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/index.asp) <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/index.asp>
 - Introduction to Tai Chi and Qi Gong for Whole Health
- [Integrative Health Coordinating Center SharePoint on Tai Chi/Qi Gong:](https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHAOPCC/IHCC/SitePages/Tai-Chi---Qi-Gong.aspx)
<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHAOPCC/IHCC/SitePages/Tai-Chi---Qi-Gong.aspx>
- CIH Listservs. To be added, contact:
 - Tai Chi/Qi Gong listserv: VHAOPCC&CTTaiChiQiGong@va.gov
 - Other listservs: Lana.Frankenfield@va.gov
- National CIH Subject Matter Experts, as of FY2020
 - Tai Chi/Qi Gong: Kavitha Reddy or Alison Whitehead.
Kavitha.Reddy@va.gov; Alison.Whitehead@va.gov

OTHER WEBSITES

- [American Tai Chi and Qigong Association:](http://www.americantaichi.org/) <http://www.americantaichi.org/>
- [Supreme Chi Living:](http://www.americantaichi.net/) <http://www.americantaichi.net/>
 - An online journal and community run by American Tai Chi and Qi Gong Association
- [Tai Chi Health:](https://taichihealth.com/) <https://taichihealth.com/>
 - Introduction videos under Tai Chi Fundamentals tab
- [Tai Chi: A Gentle Way to Fight Stress:](http://www.mayoclinic.org/tai-chi/ART-20045184) <http://www.mayoclinic.org/tai-chi/ART-20045184>
 - Mayo Clinic's introduction to tai chi
- [Tai Chi for Beginners 01: Tai Chi Fundamentals:](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCnCSOWglIUU)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCnCSOWglIUU>
 - YouTube video

- [Tai Chi Fundamentals Adapted Program Seated Basic Moves Part 1:](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCTjyqX_vZ0)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCTjyqX_vZ0
 - YouTube video
- [Tai Chi Fundamentals® Basic Moves Part One:](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSsqgdRsf5U)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSsqgdRsf5U>
 - YouTube video led by Tricia Yu

BOOKS

- *Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi*, Peter Wayne (2013)
- *Qi Gong for Beginners*, Stanley Wilson (2007)
- *The Tai Chi Workbook*, Paul Crompton (1987)
- *The Way of Qigong: The Art and Science of Chinese Energy Healing*, Ken Cohen (1999)

APPS AND MONITORING SOFTWARE

- **7 Minute Chi.** Demonstrates various tai chi exercises.

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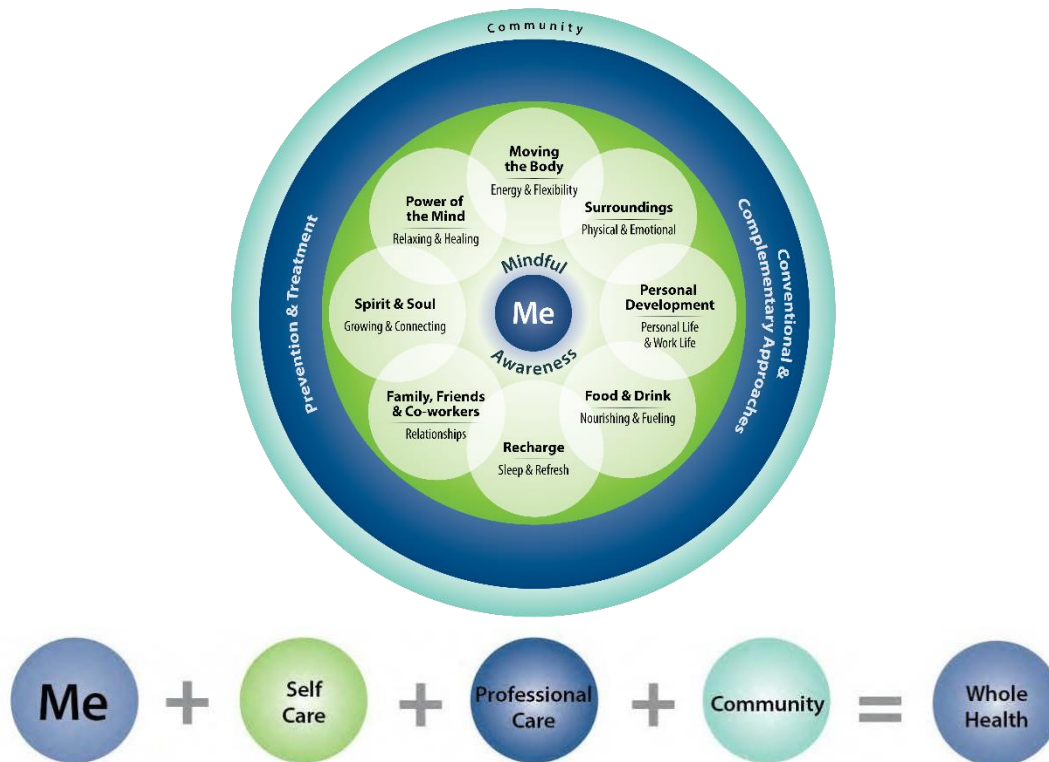
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WHOLE HEALTH: INFORMATION FOR VETERANS

Introduction to Tai Chi and Qi Gong for Whole Health



Whole Health is an approach to health care that empowers and enables YOU to take charge of your health and well-being and live your life to the fullest. It starts with YOU. It is fueled by the power of knowing yourself and what will really work for you in your life. Once you have some ideas about this, your team can help you with the skills, support, and follow up you need to reach your goals.

All resources provided in these handouts are reviewed by VHA clinicians and Veterans. No endorsement of any specific products is intended. Best wishes!

<https://www.va.gov/wholehealth/>

Introduction to Tai Chi and Qi Gong for Whole Health

What are tai chi and qi gong?

Tai chi and qi gong are mind-body practices that have been used for thousands of years to promote health. Tai chi is one form of qi gong, but there are some differences in how they are practiced. Both target the energy of the body, traditionally called “qi” (pronounced “chee”), via focused breath and movements.

Tai chi means “Grand Ultimate Fist” in Chinese, and it has origins in various martial arts practices. Author of the *Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi*, Dr. Peter Wayne, describes tai chi practice in terms of “eight active ingredients:”¹

1. Awareness: Tai chi practice develops focus and mindful awareness.
2. Intention: Tai chi practice actively uses images and visualization to enhance its health effects.
3. Structural Integration: Tai chi practice focuses on good posture and how a person positions the body. Good body positioning leads to better body function, and better function leads to better posture.
4. Active Relaxation: Tai chi practice is a form of moving meditation, using flowing and relaxing movements.
5. Strengthening and Flexibility: Tai chi uses slow movements that are done repetitively. Weight is shifted from leg-to-leg and different parts of the body are flexed and extended.
6. Natural, Freer Breathing: Tai chi practice teaches breathing skills, leading to many health benefits.
7. Social Support: Tai chi practice can involve being a part of a group class. This allows people to form community.
8. Embodied Spirituality: Tai chi practice allows the body, mind, and spirit to work together which helps a person focus on how they connect with others around them.

The “eight active ingredients” described for tai chi also apply to qi gong. Like tai chi, qi gong uses simple movements, but it also focuses on increasing and improving the flow of qi. There are many other types of qi gong in addition to those that use movement. Qi gong translates as “cultivation of life energy,” and in traditional Chinese medicine, “life energy” supports health and wellness.

The movements of qi gong are similar to tai chi in that they are slow, intentional, and coordinated with breath and/or focused attention. One difference is that qi gong postures are often performed standing in place or even while standing still.

How can tai chi and qi gong benefit my health?

More research has focused on tai chi, but practicing either tai chi or qi gong will likely have the same benefits. Below are some examples of how tai chi and qi gong may help a Veteran with the different areas of the Circle of Health.

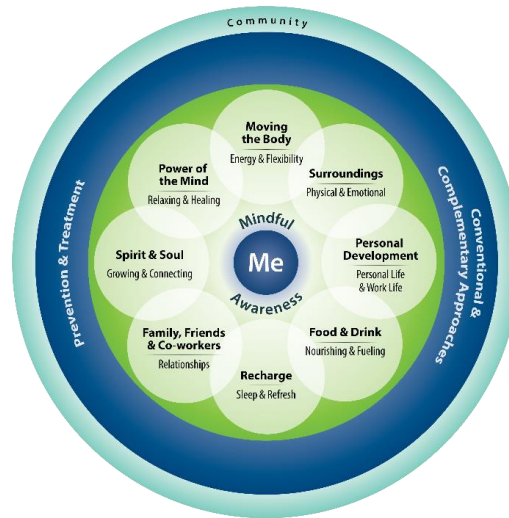


Figure 1. The Circle of Health.

Moving the Body

Tai chi has been shown to improve health in many areas:^{2,3}

- Balance
- Fall risk
- Physical fitness and muscle strength
- Flexibility
- Quality of life
- Osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, two causes of joint pain and stiffness
- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol levels
- Promoting the ability to exercise in people with chronic heart failure
- Bone density (osteoporosis)
- Immune system health
- Quality of life in people with cancer
- Chronic pain
- Fibromyalgia symptoms
- Asthma and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), including chronic bronchitis and emphysema

Personal Development

Tai chi and qi gong may help people with their personal and work lives. Research points to tai chi improving self-confidence, self-esteem, and one's ability to achieve their goals.⁴

These practices can make people feel like they have “come home”—like they have comfort in body, mind, and spirit. This supports personal development.

Food & Drink

Tai chi may affect people's eating habits. By connecting with their body, people become more in tune with feelings of hunger and/or thirst. They also begin to notice which foods and drinks make them feel the healthiest. This may be why studies have found tai chi improves blood sugar control.²

Recharge

By using gentle exercise, healthy breathing, and deep relaxation, tai chi helps people sleep better. A recent study showed that tai chi improves sleep quality in healthy people as well as those with chronic diseases.⁵

Family, Friends, & Coworkers

In the early morning, people gather in public parks throughout China to practice tai chi and qi gong. In other parts of the world, students gather to learn and practice together. This kind of group activity can lead to healthier relationships with family, friends, and coworkers. Research has shown that connecting with others promotes health.

Spirit & Soul

The beauty of practicing tai chi comes from the graceful, flowing movements that spiral through the body. With dedication, students of tai chi begin to know this flow as an integration of body, mind, and spirit. Through continued practice, tai chi allows for clear insight into what gives a person a sense of meaning and purpose.

Power of the Mind

Tai chi and qi gong help people relax. They are great options for stress reduction. Studies have shown that these exercises improve depression, decrease negative thoughts, decrease anxiety in children with attention problems, lower stress levels, and improve thinking.^{2,3}

How do I start practicing tai chi or qi gong?

Tai chi and qi gong are very safe exercises, though some people may experience minor muscle aches and pains from using muscles that haven't been exercised for a while.⁶ Therefore, it is important to listen to and care for your body when doing these movements. If you feel tai chi or qi gong will help you achieve your health care goals, set aside time to practice. As with any activity, regular practice is what allows for better health.

Where can I learn tai chi or qi gong?

Tai chi and qi gong are typically taught in groups. Classes may be held in martial arts schools, community centers, hospitals or clinics, and even at some public parks. One reliable source to find local classes is through the American Tai Chi and Qigong Association website (see below). Tai chi is an approved therapy by the VHA's Integrative Health Coordinating Center, so classes may be available at your local VA medical center.

What do I look for in a tai chi class or teacher?

If you are new to tai chi or qi gong, consider the following points when choosing a class:

- Look for a class that is "beginner," "level 1," or something similar.

- The smaller the class, the more likely the teacher will be able to give you personal guidance when needed. Classes of 10 students or less are ideal.
- How do you relate to the teacher? Sometimes it may take a few classes for you to learn the class pacing as well as teaching style. If, after 3 classes, you do not feel like the teacher or class environment is right for you, it may be time to try a different teacher or school.

Does the VA offer tai chi or qi gong classes?

Some VA medical centers offer tai chi or qi gong classes for wellness. Some classes are for specific health problems such as pain or PTSD. The Integrative Health Coordinating Center in the VHA Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation is working with VHA staff across the country to offer more Integrative Health and well-being services, including tai chi and qi gong.

For you to consider:

- Are you interested in trying tai chi or qi gong, or doing it again if you have tried it in the past?
- What questions do you have for your health care team or a tai chi/qi gong teacher before you start?
- Based on what you know about the benefits of tai chi and qi gong, how do you think it might help you?

The information in this handout is general. **Please work with your health care team to use the information in the best way possible to promote your health and well-being.**

For more information:

ORGANIZATION	RESOURCES	WEBSITE
American Tai Chi and Qigong Association	Search engine for tai chi and qi gong schools throughout the United States; funded by National Institutes of Health	https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/tai-chi-and-qi-gong-in-depth http://americantaichi.org/resources.asp
Tai Chi for Beginners video	Tai chi and qi gong for beginners YouTube video by family doctor and tai chi researcher Dr. Paul Lam	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIOHGrYCEJ4

This handout was written for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) by Vincent Minichiello MD, Assistant Professor and Integrative Health Physician, University of Wisconsin Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. It is based in part on a document for clinicians, Passport to Whole Health, written by Adam Rindfleisch, MD, MPhil. The handout was reviewed and edited by Veterans and VHA subject matter experts.

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