

Five questions: A healthy motion

T'ai Chi has benefits for body and mind



Jim Starshak of Shawnee (left) leads a group of 58 T'ai Chi for Health instructors for a recent workshop he organized in Kansas City. Below, Starshak, owner of The Home Gym, discusses the benefits of T'ai Chi. [Enlarge photo](#)

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Q. What is T'ai Chi?

A. Although T'ai Chi originated in ancient China thousands of years ago, today it is the perfect exercise for young and old alike. T'ai Chi strengthens the body, builds core stability, reduces stress, improves balance and enhances your overall health through a series of gentle, flowing movements. It emphasizes breathing, mental quietness and the conscious circulation of energy throughout your body.

Q. Why learn T'ai Chi?

A. Some do it for fitness, others as a art form, but for most — including me — it is to improve their health and well being. Tai Chi is a fun and social activity that is easy to learn, needs no special equipment and really improves your quality of life.

Q. How has it been shown to be beneficial?

A. I have seen improvements in dozens of students and scientific studies confirm what I see — that T'ai Chi is amazingly effective at improving overall health. Most notable are improvements in balance, posture, digestion, immune system and quality of sleep, as well as reductions in stress, blood pressure and the symptoms of arthritis, fibromyalgia and diabetes.

Q. How has T'ai Chi helped you?

A. Most of my 22 years in the U.S. Army were in extremely rigorous Special Forces jobs. Now, as a 60 percent disabled veteran, I need an exercise program that will maintain my health without compounding those injuries. I benefit from Tai Chi by reducing arthritis pain, maintaining range of motion, relieving mental and physical stress and reducing acid reflux.

Q. What is the best way to get started?

A. There are several T'ai Chi classes every week in the Shawnee Civic Centre. You can look on the Tai Chi for Health Web site (taichi-productions.com/classes/find_instructors) or contact me at 322-0764.

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