

Boost Memory with Tai Chi

by Shoshanna Katzman



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Tai Chi is a low impact exercise for facilitating physical fitness and creating vibrant health. People are drawn to this ancient exercise

to discover internal peace, enliven their energetic system and achieve overall wellness. It is traditionally known for enhancing coordination, strength, flexibility and endurance along with balance and upright stature. Tai Chi prevents as well as provides palliative support for many types of injuries and health conditions, stemming from its ability to ameliorate pain and reduce inflammation by opening qi (vital energy) and blood flow throughout the body. This exercise artform maximizes immune function by building defensive qi and promotes cardiovascular health by nourishing qi of the heart and lungs. It invigorates reproductive and sexual energy through balancing hormones, enhancing blood flow and boosting kidney qi. Tai Chi is well-known

for its ability to stabilize emotions, create a more tranquil existence and retard the aging process.

As a “meditation through movement”, Tai Chi is an excellent choice for those seeking a sharper approach to life through mindfulness training. Previous research has shown it to help slow down cognitive decline. More recently NPR’s Morning Edition aired a segment on November 6, 2023, about a new study published in *Annals of Internal Medicine* finding the practice of Tai Chi to be beneficial in boosting memory.

The number one concern in terms of cognitive function as people age is Alzheimer’s, which is a form of dementia causing abnormal changes in the brain that affect memory and other mental abilities. In the United States, approximately 5.5 million people aged 65 and older as well as 200,000 people under the age of

65 have been diagnosed with this disease according to the Alzheimer’s Association. As this disease progresses, full assistance is typically required due to severe memory loss, impaired decision making, language difficulty and poor judgment – placing an enormous emotional and financial toll on family members.

A major focus of Alzheimer’s research is to evaluate strategies that reduce occurrence of mild cognitive impairment, which is a minor but noticeable decrease in memory and cognitive skills believed to be a risk factor for developing this disease. Fortunately, Tai Chi research has begun to shine light that this slow-moving form of exercise can help slow cognitive decline and protect against dementia. Results are bringing hope to many people that there is something they can do to maintain their mental faculties.

This recent study included about 300 older adults in their mid-70s on average who took a 10-minute test called the Montreal Cognitive Assessment to gauge their cognitive function. Study results showed that participants who practiced Tai Chi twice a week for approximately six months improved their score by 1.5 points which the author of the study, Dr. Elizabeth Eckstrom, explains: “you’ve basically given yourself three extra years” of staving off decline. She further states based on these results, “if you’re able to keep doing [tai chi] two or three days a week on a routine basis, you’re going to get extra years before you hit that decline into dementia.” Her theory as to why Tai Chi is effective is due to combining the memorization of the movements like a dance choreography. She further adds: “So, you’re getting the physical activity, plus the memory piece.” Due to these benefits, researchers state that they would like to see efforts to make Tai Chi more accessible especially because approximately 1 in 5 people have