



Tai chi may ease fibromyalgia pain

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By **Liz Szabo, USA TODAY**



By Muhammed Muheisen, AP

Women practice tai chi in Beijing, China, June 27. Tai chi, sometimes known as "shadow boxing," is a form of martial arts which combines slow graceful movements with meditation.

Tai chi, an ancient Chinese practice of exercise and meditation, may relieve symptoms of a painful chronic condition called fibromyalgia, a small new study shows.

Tai chi involves gentle, flowing movements in which students shift their weight and breathe deeply, cycling through a series of stances with poetic names, such as "white crane spreads its wings." The philosophy of tai chi involves moving a person's vital energy, or *qi* ("chee"), through the body.

In the study, doctors randomly assigned 66 fibromyalgia patients to take either a 12-week tai chi class or attend a "wellness education" class that included stretching exercises, according to a study in today's *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Fibromyalgia patients experience pain, stiffness, fatigue and other problems.

All participants attended two hour-long classes a week and had instructions to practice at home 20 minutes a day. Most were women with an average age of 50, and most were overweight.

After finishing the course, 79% of tai chi participants said their symptoms had improved, compared with 39% of those in the educational class, the study shows. It was financed by the National Center for Complementary and [Alternative Medicine](#), a branch of the [National Institutes of Health](#).

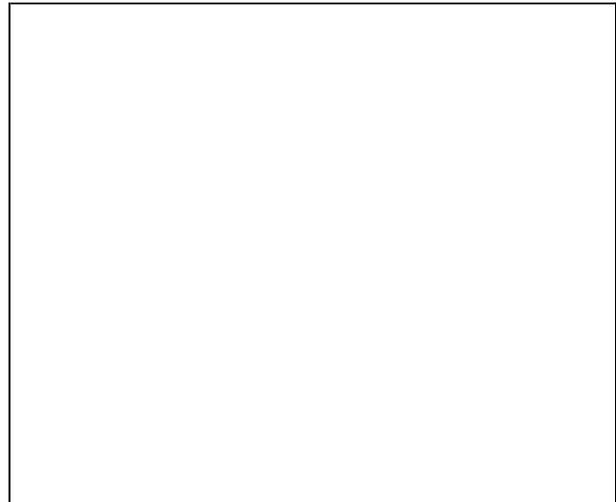
Tai chi students reported improvements in mood, sleep, quality of life and their ability to exercise.

Even three months after the classes ended, 82% of tai chi students still felt better, compared with 53% of the comparison group, the study says.

A study in 2007 from the National Institutes of Health found that 2.3 million American adults had used tai chi in the past year.

In an accompanying editorial, [Harvard Medical School's](#) Gloria Yeh and others note that the study had limitations. Yeh notes that researchers don't know which aspects of tai chi were most helpful: the

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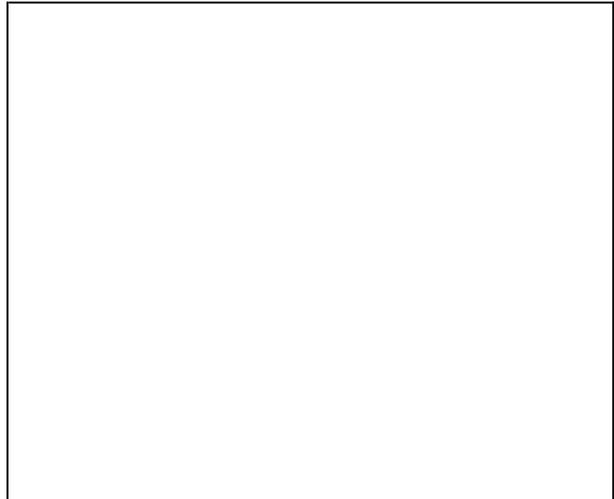
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with multiple teachers, at different locations, perhaps comparing it with yoga and other therapies — to really understand tai chi's benefits.

But Callahan notes that tai chi has few drawbacks. Even the cost of a class, which can top \$50 a month, is modest compared with the cost of many medications. And unlike drugs, tai chi had no harmful side effects, she says.

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