



Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance

What is it?

Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance (pronounced tye gee chuwan) is a heavily researched, group-based falls prevention program delivered by trained leaders. Tai Ji Quan is designed to improve strength, balance, mobility, and daily functioning, reducing participants' risk of falling. It represents a shift in focus of traditional Tai Ji Quan training and performance as it transforms martial arts movements into a therapeutic regimen designed to improve postural stability, awareness of body positioning in space, functional walking, movement symmetry and coordination, range of motion around the ankles and hips, and increase lower extremity muscle strength. Participants attend 60-minute sessions at least twice per week for 24 weeks or longer. Participants practice controlling their center of gravity during self-initiated sway and body shift exercises.

Who is it for?

Tai Ji Quan is best suited for community-dwelling older adults and people with a history of falls, balance disorders, leg muscle weakness, abnormal gait, or walking difficulty. It is especially valuable to patients with Parkinson's Disease, and can accommodate people with a mild level of mobility difficulty (e.g., occasional cane users). Because of the unique, recreation-like format of Tai Ji, the program may be especially appropriate for individuals who are not receptive to attending "traditional" falls prevention classes.

What does it do?

The program focuses heavily on the development of functional balance. It has been heavily researched, with initial, exploratory studies showing the value of Tai Ji in reducing falls. Subsequent RCTs showed benefits in postural stability, functional capacity, and falls reduction in patients with Parkinson's Disease (NEJM, 2011). Multiple translational studies have confirmed the program's value in older adults in community settings, including measured improvements in physical performance and as much as a 50% reduction in falls in community senior centers. Other analyses have shown cost-effectiveness ratios of >\$900 per fall prevented and shown the program to be more cost-effective than either resistance training or stretching. Pilot data suggests the program may also have value in improving global cognitive function, although the evidence of this is not a strong.

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How to Discuss With Patients

Older adults highly value their independence and worry about the implications of being labeled as a fall risk. They may not openly discuss fears or concerns they have about falling. As such, it may be necessary for you to initiate the discussion. It is important to highlight to your patient that the goal of this program is to keep him or her independent, active, and at home for as long as possible. You should emphasize that the program is safe and fun and that, although Tai Ji may seem unusual in Western culture, it has been shown to be very helpful for this purpose and in this form. It may also be useful to highlight the social benefits of the program and the fact that many patients like him or her have benefited from both the exercise and the group classes.