

Tai Chi May Benefit Patients With Fibromyalgia

People with fibromyalgia may benefit from practicing tai chi, according to a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Fibromyalgia is a disorder characterized by muscle pain, fatigue, and other symptoms. People with fibromyalgia have chronic widespread pain, as well as “tender points” on areas of the body, which hurt when slight pressure is applied. Although exercise appears to be an important part of fibromyalgia treatment, many people with fibromyalgia need medication to control symptoms and are unable to maintain muscle strength, flexibility, and overall fitness.

Researchers, funded in part by NCCAM, evaluated the physical and psychological benefits of tai chi (which combines meditation, slow movements, deep breathing, and relaxation) in 66 people with fibromyalgia. The participants were assigned to one of two groups: an attention control group that received wellness education and practiced stretching exercises, or a tai chi group that received instruction in tai chi principles and techniques and practiced 10 forms of Yang-style tai chi. Both groups met in 1-hour sessions twice a week for 12 weeks and also practiced daily at home. Tai chi participants used an instructional DVD to continue practice for 12 more weeks.

Compared with the attention control group, the tai chi group had a significantly greater decrease in total score on the Fibromyalgia Impact Questionnaire at 12 weeks. In addition, the tai chi group demonstrated greater improvement in sleep quality, mood, and quality of life. Improvements were still present at 24 weeks. No adverse events were reported.

The researchers concluded that these findings support previous research indicating benefits of tai chi for musculoskeletal pain, depression, and quality of life. The underlying mechanisms are unknown, and the researchers noted that larger, longer term studies are needed to evaluate the potential benefits of tai chi for patients with fibromyalgia.

References

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