

Taijiquan as a Health Exercise

This is part one of a series of four pieces about different aspects of Taijiquan.

Taijiquan as a Health Exercise has, amongst other benefits, been reported to:

- ① improve muscle tone
- ② reduce stress
- ③ improve posture
- ④ raise energy levels
- ⑤ improve circulation
- ⑥ balance blood pressure

As China has no NHS, the people have to be responsible for their own day to day health care. Exercising in public is the norm as apartments are often very small, so the parks are always well used by young and old alike. While the majority of younger generations prefer jogging, tennis and even outdoor Ballroom Dancing, the older generation use Taiji and other Qigong sequences as their way to maintain general health.

The health benefits of Taiji and Qigong are well researched and many studies have been done here and in America in relation to heart disease, stress and arthritis. Because these kinds of movement are low impact they are very beneficial for the joints and can continue to be practised into 'old age'.

The benefits go much deeper than muscles and bones. Even when an untrained person moves slowly with the intention of mimicking a Taiji player, this will have an effect on how they feel in their body as they have to be more centred and connected to move with this quality. So when practised regularly

with the underlying principles (particularly - Soft Limit) in place, along with conscious awareness, the circulation improves and energy levels rise. >>> On a deeper level, the meridian system, and through this, the internal organs as well as the immune system, become stronger through the balancing of extremes and excesses. This applies both within the body and, because of the increased level of awareness, how we carry ourselves and care for ourselves (and each other) in daily life.

We are using the mind to become more conscious of the body and in turn, listening to the body's innate wisdom to reflect back how our thoughts and attitudes influence posture, stress levels and tensions.

So whether you are a beginner or an experienced practitioner, Taiji and Qigong have great potential in keeping you healthy. Obviously, if it wasn't effective people would have stopped practising long ago.

On a personal note, the quality (depth) of my practice, is more important than quantity (length of a session). The quality of my life (depth of aliveness) is more important than how long I live. This applies to health as well as other aspects of these arts.

The next newsletter will cover Taijiquan as Moving Meditation.