

# A new study from the University of California-Los Angeles suggests that Tai Chi is a useful remedy for chronic inflammation in breast cancer survivors with insomnia.

Tai Chi (pronounced "tie chee") is a Chinese martial art characterized by slow and gentle movements and an emphasis on deep breathing and meditation. Some practitioners of Tai Chi believe that it assists the flow of a life energy called qi (pronounced "chee") throughout the body.

Some studies have also suggested that Tai Chi may be a beneficial form of exercise for people with Parkinson's disease, chronic heart failure patients and people with fibromyalgia, among other conditions.

Research has shown that women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer in the past 10 years are three times more likely to experience insomnia. This insomnia can increase inflammation, which is a risk factor for both cancer recurrence and heart disease.

Between 2007 and 2013, Dr. Michael Irwin, of the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center, analyzed blood samples from 90 participants aged 30-85 before and after they began to practice Tai Chi.

Dr. Irwin claims in the study that Tai Chi was effective for reducing inflammation in breast cancer patients who have insomnia following diagnosis and treatment.

However, at the time of publication, UCLA have not provided Medical News Today with details on how many of the participants were breast cancer patients or control subjects, or detailed the extent of the inflammation reduction. The study's findings are published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

## Tai Chi 'down-regulates' inflammation genes

Irwin claims that inflammation is reduced by Tai Chi relaxing the practitioner's body. "When people practice Tai Chi, there's a decrease in the stress hormone system by the sympathetic nervous system," he says.

He adds:

"We saw that Tai Chi reversed cellular inflammation, by producing a down-regulation of the genes that lead to inflammation. Tai Chi is a movement meditation, and we have found that similar anti-inflammatory effects occur when people practice other forms of meditation."

A UCLA news release quotes a two-time breast cancer survivor, Linda Tucker, who took part in Irwin's trial. Tucker experienced extensive sleep problems, which she says were remedied by practicing Tai Chi.

"I absolutely did not sleep, my eyes would not stay asleep, my body just would not relax and I found myself awake until 6 in the morning," she says.

"I said to myself, this has to be a joke, this is not going to work or do anything," she recalls of the Tai Chi program. "But after two sessions the insomnia started going away. I just felt a sense of peacefulness."

Recently, the journal Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics published the results of a randomized controlled trial that found Tai Chi has beneficial effects on the inflammatory system.

Another 2014 study found that Tai Chi may slow the aging process by contributing to an increase of CD34+ cells - stem cells important to a variety of the body's functions and structures.

## Fast facts about Tai Chi

- Tai Chi draws on principles of Taoism and Confucianism dating back to early Chinese history
- Some stories claim that Tai Chi was created in the 12th century as a "form of fighting based on softness" by a Taoist monk named Zhang Sanfeng
- There are five different styles of Tai Chi, some of which are defensive and some of which are more clearly health-focused.

Sources: UCLA news release, accessed 27 October 2014.