

The Eight Active Ingredients of Tai Chi

1. Awareness - including mindfulness and focused attention. Perhaps the most fundamental ingredient underlying Tai Chi, the slow, deliberate movements and attention to breathing, body positions, and sensations, fosters acute self-awareness, a prerequisite to all other ingredients. The emphasis on moment-to-moment awareness results in mindfulness and improved focus.

2. Intention - including belief and expectations. Additional active ingredients of imagery, visualization, and related cognitive tools alter intention, belief, and expectation, and contribute significantly to the therapeutic and physiological effects of Tai Chi.

3. Structural Integration - including dynamic form and function. Enhanced integration within and between multiple structural and physiological systems is another key active ingredient that underlies Tai Chi's therapeutic effect. Biomechanically efficient shapes and patterns of movement have functional consequences across many systems.

4. Active Relaxation - Tai Chi's circular, flowing motion helps shift the body and mind into deeper levels of relaxation, and is a form of meditation in motion.

5. Strengthening and Flexibility - Tai Chi provides moderate aerobic training equal to levels obtained by walking at a moderate pace. The integrated movements result in less strain, greater power with less effort, and better balance. The slowness of the Tai Chi movements, in combination with the slightly flexed stances and placing weight on one leg at a time for sustained periods, leads to significant lower extremity strength training and increased loading on the skeleton, which promotes strong bones. In addition, slow, continuous, relaxed, and repetitive movement also results in dynamic stretching, which enhances overall flexibility.

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6. Natural Freer Breathing. More efficient breathing improves gas exchange, massages body tissues, including internal organs, helps regulate the nervous system, improves mood, and balances and moves Qi within the body and between the body and the environment.

7. Social Support - including interaction and community. Being part of a group has proven therapeutic value for various medical conditions, including cancer, heart disease, depression and anxiety. In ongoing Tai Chi classes, students develop a strong sense of community, and with rich interactions and support from teachers and peers, often undergo and profound journey of self-discovery.

8. Embodied Spirituality - including philosophy and ritual. Tai Chi creates a practical framework for practicing living with a more holistic, Eastern philosophy that integrates body, mind and spirit. It can also be a powerful vehicle to add a spiritual dimension to your life. Also, the ritualistic practice of Tai Chi may help amplify and sustain its therapeutic benefits.

The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi: 12 Weeks to a Healthy Body, Strong Heart, and Sharp Mind.

By Peter M. Wayne, Ph.D., and Mark L. Fuerst. Boston, Shambhala Press, 2013. Index, detailed notes, 336 pages. A Harvard Health Publication. ISBN: 978-1590309421.

'The Eight Active Ingredients of Tai Chi' are explained on pp. 30-65.

Tai Chi Class in Red Bluff, California

Instructor: Mike Garofalo

Tai Chi Class Information: <http://www.egreenway.com/tcc.htm>

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