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Tai Chi: A Gentle Practice with Powerful Benefits

Over the past year, I've discovered something unexpected: a deep appreciation for the ancient practice of Tai Chi.

Before 2024, my knowledge of Tai Chi was limited to glimpses of people moving slowly and gracefully in parks. It looked peaceful, even meditative—but I never gave it much thought. That changed last summer when I joined five other Extension Educators from across Illinois in a multi-step certification process for *Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention*. The training included both online and in-person components, and though I was nervous, I decided to jump in.

I began by learning the basics. Tai Chi originated in ancient China and has evolved into various styles over the centuries. While traditional forms can be complex and physically demanding, *Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention* is designed to be gentle and accessible. It emphasizes four key principles: fluid movement, breath control, mind-body integration, and mental focus.

Why Tai Chi?

Falls are one of the most costly and dangerous health concerns for older adults. According to the world's largest fall prevention study, recurring falls were reduced by **67%** among those who practiced Tai Chi. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Arthritis Foundation both support Tai Chi for Health programs due to their proven effectiveness.

The Benefits Are Clear

Tai Chi offers a wide range of physical and mental benefits, including:

- Increased flexibility, muscle strength, and overall fitness
- Improved balance and posture
- Reduced pain and stiffness
- Enhanced ability to perform daily tasks

More Than Just Exercise

Despite all the research, what keeps me coming back to Tai Chi is the joy and camaraderie of the class. It's fun, energizing, and confidence-boosting. The group dynamic adds something special to the experience.

Class participants have shared their own reflections:

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“If you have not tried Tai Chi, I would encourage you to—for balance, memory, etc.”

“Living alone, falling is a big concern. The emphasis on weight shifting was incredibly helpful.”

“Tai Chi is great for getting you moving. The group experience is wonderful.”

“I was starting to worry about falling. By continuing Tai Chi, I feel more comfortable moving, especially outdoors.”

Tai Chi has become more than just a wellness practice for me—it’s a way to connect, focus, and move with confidence. If you’ve ever been curious, I encourage you to give it a try. You might be surprised by how much it can enrich your life.

Ready to Begin Your Tai Chi Journey?

If you’re interested in experiencing the benefits of Tai Chi for yourself, the University of Illinois Extension serving Livingston, McLean, and Woodford Counties will be offering *Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention* classes in each of the three counties in the coming months. These classes are designed to be safe, supportive, and accessible for adults of all ages and abilities.

To learn more and register, visit go.illinois.edu/lmw.

About the Author

[Sara Attig](#) is a Family Life Educator with University of Illinois Extension, serving Livingston, McLean, and Woodford Counties. Attig uses her expertise to deliver impactful and meaningful programs about the dimensions of wellness, aging, and much more to Livingston, McLean, and Woodford Counties and beyond.