

A Potent Practice

The Wellness approach is all about making better choices, with the goal to build resilience in the face of the flow of life's changes. Better choice in the realm of diet for example, would suggest focusing on choosing more nutritionally dense foods. In the realm of physical wellness we try to look for strong supportive practices, and research suggests that for seniors, a most potent practice is **Tai Chi**. Developed out of the Chinese Taoist tradition, tai chi aims to connect with the life force, or chi, to learn to direct it and ultimately to accumulate it for overall vitality. In practice, Tai Chi is a sequence of flowing movements which develop stronger individual attention as a moving meditation. As it is taught and often practiced in a group setting, the social support and encouragement makes it a powerful community building tool.

Here are some recent findings on Tai Chi's benefits reprinted from the UC Berkeley Wellness Letter (click on the hyperlinks to read the studies :

Boosted brain power. In a [study](#) in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease*, which included 120 healthy older people in China, those who practiced tai chi three times a week for 40 weeks showed increases in brain volume and improvements on several tests of memory and learning, compared to those not doing the exercise.

Less depression and anxiety. Tai chi showed positive effects on various measures of psychological well-being, including reduced depression, anxiety, and stress management, according to a [systematic review](#) of 42 studies in the *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*. And tai chi yielded statistically significant reductions in anxiety symptoms in 12 of 17 studies included in a [review](#) in the *Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine*.

Better balance, fewer falls. Much research has shown that tai chi can improve balance and coordination, as well as reduce fall risk. [Guidelines about fall prevention](#) in older people from the American Geriatrics Society and its British counterpart recommend tai chi because it targets strength, gait, and balance.

Reduced pain and improved function in people with chronic conditions. In an analysis of 33 studies published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, researchers looked at tai chi's effects in nearly 1,600 people with breast cancer, [osteoarthritis](#), heart failure, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Overall, tai chi was found to have favorable effects on knee muscle strength, walking ability, and quality of life. In particular, it reduced pain and stiffness in people with osteoarthritis and shortness of breath in people with COPD. Tai chi was typically practiced two or three times a week for 12 weeks in the studies.

Tai Chi Class Comes to Lathrop

Thanks to the efforts of resident Joe Kulin, and subsidized by the Northampton Association's annual contributions for developing fitness programming, a demonstration class will be offered to explore whether Tai Chi practice would be a good choice for you. **Tuesday January 16 at 3:45**, Suzanne Strauss, a senior student of the Long River tai chi school and current teacher at the Northampton Senior Center, will introduce the new class at the Meeting House. Going

forward, the plan is to trial a 6-week subsidized subscription series with a possible second series if the interest is there. The overall cost is \$75/class x 6, with Lathrop and the Northampton Association each covering \$25/class. The balance of the cost for the series would be shared by all who committed to the series. The hope is that enough people connect to this potent practice to keep the ongoing class supported at an affordable rate for Lathrop residents.