

Tai Chi For Women

Contributed by Pallavi Bhattacharya
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Relaxation, mood stabilising, weight loss, age control and self-defence - an adept Tai Chi practitioner can develop all of them. And aren't these the very things every woman wants to acquire? Tai Chi, an internal martial art developed on thousands of years of Chinese history and culture is now taught and practised in India.

Sensei Sandeep Desai, the first Indian to study Tai Chi in Chen Family Village, China, the birthplace of this internal martial art, and to be officially authorised by Master Zhu Tian Cai, to teach the traditional Chen Style Tai Chi, says that more than 50 percent of his students are women.

Sensei Desai, who also holds 5th Dan black belt in karate, acquired in Japan, however, has a note of caution, "Tai Chi isn't as effortless as it may seem. People think that it is very easy to relax but nothing can be further from the truth. In reality to be truly relaxed is a very difficult accomplishment. Tai Chi first helps to improve one's health and then one's fitness."

"Many people however try to improve their fitness without improving their health not keeping in sync with the Tai Chi principles. Tai Chi comes from a very high degree of mind and body coordination. Nine out of ten learners however don't have that. So when they actually realize this they get disheartened. Instead of improving or making a sustained effort to make an improvement they quit."

So it's best to join Tai Chi if you can promise dedication. Also a Tai Chi practitioner should have no ego hassles. For instance if a renowned professional joins a Tai Chi class with a haughty mindset that he is superior to everyone else in the class, he'll never be able to master Tai Chi. "You must come with an empty mind. After all an empty cup holds the most," advises Sensei.Desai.

All of the Tai Chi exercises are done standing up with no floor exercises whatsoever. Tai Chi players don't have to lock their knees or any joint. Also you don't over stress your body in Tai Chi by moving any more than 70% of your body weight.

Sensei says, "If one correctly puts the principles in place, everything comes together and there are moments of magic. But if one moves without understanding the principles Tai Chi is nothing but a series of dance steps which look good on the surface but don't give you the actual benefits of Tai Chi."

Meditation In Motion

Speaking of the actual benefits of Tai Chi there are just too many. First and foremost Tai Chi is called 'meditation in motion' as Tai Chi practitioners meditate while they are moving. One's focus needs to be turned inwards. The mind operates either in the direct or mechanical mode.

While in the mechanical mode one shifts one's focus amongst the matters of the past, present and future. The direct mode infuses in your mind 'the power of now'.

Tai Chi puts a person in the direct mode. Sensei Desai adds, "In the process you develop spontaneity, directness and aliveness - you can experience them directly without thinking."

Energising The Body

Tai Chi fully exercises every muscle, gland, tissue and joint, making one stronger, healthier and more vibrant with the passing years. Sensei Desai explains, "Tai Chi removes internal weaknesses which makes illness possible in the first place. Tai Chi in fact stimulates and strengthens every vital organ of the body. One's health after all does not come from one's muscles but from one's organs like the liver, heart and kidneys".

Boosting Spinal Strength and Flexibility

The Tai Chi spinal stretch exercises help one's spine to stay long and healthy. The spine loses vitality, degenerates and becomes shorter with age- the spinal stretch exercises retard this process. One's balance arises from one's spine. Tai Chi makes one's back and spine exceedingly strong boosting bodily balance. It enables one to stretch and open each vertebra from the bottom to the top releasing tension from the spine and spinal muscles.

Improving Concentration

Tai Chi trains the mind to stay concentrated for a long period of time with focused relaxation. Sensei says, "Becoming relaxed helps the mind to see many possibilities simultaneously than sequentially. Tai Chi reduces stress from both one's muscles and mind, healing emotions and bringing them under one's conscious control. It irrigates and massages one's mind making one realize that the mind is the commander of all energy. If the mind is restless one's energy will stray aimlessly - scattering and digging rather than gathering and collecting".

Slowing Ageing

Tai Chi slows ageing. Sensei Desai's explanation is, "As Tai Chi slows one down, and it helps one focus on the present moment thereby retarding ageing."

Losing Weight

For guaranteed weight loss one must perform Tai Chi exercises before breakfast. Sensei advises, "When one performs these exercises in the morning the body automatically burns off stored fat to derive the necessary calories to perform the exercises. After the food has entered one's stomach the body automatically resorts to the calories derived from digestion and therefore doesn't burn much fat. The body must abstain from food for ten to twelve hours before the blood sugar level

drops low enough for the body to switch to fat for fuel.”

Self-Defence Skills

Tai Chi at an advanced stage is a form of self defence. And that’s a skill all women need to know.

Sensei however reminds his students repeatedly, “The basic objective of Tai Chi to increase the awareness of energy in the body. If people just come with particular objectives, like weight loss or age control, they won’t be able to master Tai Chi.”

63-year-old Jennifer Mirza, Executive Producer of Saeed Akhtar Mirza Productions joined Sensei Desai's Tai Chi classes four years ago after suffering from vertigo, tinnitus and high blood pressure. Tai Chi has not only cured all of Jennifer's health problems but has had a calming effect on both her body and mind.

Jennifer says, “The exercises are gentle and one is able to perform most of them no matter what the state of one’s health may be. I am a hyper-active person by nature, and while initially I had to train myself ‘to slow down’, I now realise the benefit one derives from doing all things slowly and calmly like Tai Chi is done.

Sensei Sandeep Desai has that inspirational quality as a teacher. He embodies that calm, disciplined and yet understanding quality that he hopes his students will imbibe. He is patient with his students yet urges them to extend the boundaries of their abilities. Also he is constantly seeking to improve himself and goes abroad regularly to learn from the Grand masters in this form of martial arts.”

Sensei Desai’s Tai Chi classes include a One-Day-Foundation Course teaching seven simple exercises, classes for stress management and programmes tailored for children and senior citizens.

To join Sensei Sandeep Desai’s Tai Chi classes contact:

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Clarification: This is just to clarify Jennifer Mirza's statement quoted in the article. Jennifer was advised by the doctor to take some form of regular exercise to lower her blood pressure. She opted for Tai Chi and though she is still on medication she still feels she derives a lot from Tai Chi- mentally and

physically.

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