

WESTGATE ORTHOPAEDIC PHYSICAL THERAPY & EXERCISE INC., P.S.



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Health Benefits of Tai Chi

Research keeps accumulating about the health benefits of tai chi. Tai chi consists of slow, balanced, low-impact movements derived from animal movements.

Studies have long shown that tai chi offers physical and mental benefits for young and old, healthy and less so. It's a good complement to aerobic exercise and weight training.

- **Balance, coordination, and reduction in falls.** New 2011 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. Research has shown that tai chi can improve balance and coordination, as well as reduce the risk of falls.
- **Arthritis relief.** In a 2009 study from Tufts University, people over 65 with knee osteoarthritis who took tai chi classes twice weekly for 12 weeks experienced less pain and had improved physical function, compared to a group that did stretching and received counseling.
- **Physical therapy and rehabilitation.** As a highly adaptable adjunct to other kinds of physical therapy, tai chi can aid in recovery from injuries and after a heart attack or surgery. The exercises can take your joints through their full range of motion, restoring flexibility. Physical therapists can individualize tai chi programs for various problems.
- **Relaxation and sleep.** Tai chi promotes relaxation and can relieve tension and anxiety. In a 2008 UCLA study, older people with moderate sleep complaints who took up tai chi (20 simple movements) reported better sleep and daytime functioning (less drowsiness, for example) after 25 weeks.
- **Overall fitness.** Studies have shown that older people who start doing tai chi can improve their ability to walk, lift weights, run, and do daily activities.
- **Diabetes control.** A 2009 study from the University of Florida School of Nursing focused on people with type 2 diabetes who took tai chi classes (twice a week, with three days of home practice a week) for six months. Those who adhered to the program significantly lowered their blood sugar and also managed the disease better than those who did not stick with it. Tai chi's effect on diabetes control is similar to that of aerobic exercise, the researchers concluded.

Getting Started

Until you are adept at tai chi, you'll need an instructor. It's satisfying, as well as practical, to join a group. Classes are often available at health clubs, colleges, and adult education centers. Make sure the class you sign up for is for health and relaxation, rather than combat. The International Taoist Tai Chi Society (www.taoist.org) lists instructors and classes in many countries and localities.

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Banana Cupcakes

Makes 12 servings

2¼ cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp baking powder
½ tsp baking soda
1/8 tsp salt
4 ripe bananas, cut into chunks
1 cup fat-free buttermilk
¼ cup unsalted butter, softened
¼ cup+3 Tbsp packed light brown sugar
1 large egg, at room temperature
½ cup currants
1¼ cups part-skim ricotta cheese
2 Tbsp unsweetened cocoa powder
1 Tbsp rum

Per Serving (1 cupcake): 255 Cal,
7g Fat, 4g Sat Fat, 0g Trans Fat,
37mg Chol, 172mg Sod, 43g Carb,
3g Fib, 7g Prot, 121mg Calc

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F; line 12-cup muffin tin with double paper liners.
2. Into a medium bowl, sift the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
3. In a large bowl, with an electric mixer on medium speed, beat the bananas, buttermilk, butter, ¼ cup of the brown sugar, and the egg. Stir in the flour mixture until just blended. Stir in the currants. Fill the muffin cups two-thirds full with the batter. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Cool completely in the pan on a rack.
4. Meanwhile, to prepare the frosting, in a food processor or blender, combine the ricotta, the remaining 3 tablespoons of brown sugar, the cocoa powder, and the rum; blend until smooth. Spread the frosting on the cooled cupcakes.

Weight Watchers® New Complete Cookbook 2006

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