

## Tai Chi, Qigong and Weight Loss

### Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of tai chi and qigong on weight loss. The results of several studies that compared the effect of tai chi and various qigong exercises were summarized. Some studies found that these two groups of Chinese exercises performed significantly better in terms of weight reduction than did more traditional exercises. One study compared the results of tai chi ba duan jin, yijinjing, Shaolin neigong, liu zi jue and other exercises and found that some exercises were better than others for certain cells. Tai chi was best at improving CD4+ and NK cells. Ba duan jin was best at improving CD3+ and CD8+ cells. Both Mawangdui Dao Yin and Da Wu could reduce TG, TC and LDL C and increase HDL C to some extent.

**Keywords:** Tai Chi, Qigong, Weight loss, Traditional Chinese Medicine, TCM

### Introduction

Tai chi has been around for hundreds of years[1-28]. Although it is considered an ancient Chinese martial art, in recent decades its health benefits have been increasingly recognized in the West. Qigong [pronounced chee gong] is a close cousin of tai chi. Qigong is not a martial art per se, but it is part of tai chi. It is the internal energy force that is present in any and all tai chi exercises when performed properly. Tai chi and qigong are sometimes referred to as forms of moving meditation. They are both classified as exercises.

Qigong[29-61] has been in existence for several thousand years. It has been used to treat, and even cure, a wide range of ailments. Tai chi and qigong are both considered to be components of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). In China and some other Asian countries they are sometimes used as the primary treatment for a disease or ailment, while in other cases they are used as supplementary treatments. In Western medical practices, if they are used at all, they are almost always used as supplementary treatments. One common feature they have is that they both awaken the body's natural healing process. They strengthen the body's immune system, and, with regular practice, protect against the onset of disease.

### The Study

The focus of the present study is on the effectiveness of tai chi and qigong on weight loss. Since both tai chi and qigong are forms of exercise, one might expect that there is some positive effect, since any exercise will result in weight loss if the exercise burns calories, all other things being equal. Not many studies have focused on the effectiveness of tai chi and qigong exercises on weight loss. The goal of the present study is to find and summarize some of the studies that have been done on this subtopic.

The Tai Chi Foundation [62] lists some of the benefits of tai chi, including weight reduction. They include:

1. Mind-Body Connection.
2. Low-Impact Exercise.
3. Caloric Expenditure.
4. Stress Reduction.
5. Improved Metabolism.
6. Better Sleep Quality.
7. Long-Term Sustainability.

A blurb on the World Tai Chi Day website states that the average 120-pound person can burn about 250 calories and a 150-pound person can burn around 300 calories in a one-hour tai chi session[63] Others have mentioned that performing tai chi exercises has similar benefits [64-65]. Being overweight can have a number of adverse health consequences[66-69], so it is important to make an effort to control weight.

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Hui et al. [70] studied the effects of tai chi and walking exercises on weight loss, metabolic syndrome parameters and bone mineral density in 374 middle-age Hong Kong Chinese adults. Their training regimen lasted for 12 weeks, and consisted of 45 minutes per day, five days a week. The tai chi group lost 0.50kg of body weight and 0.47kg of fat mass, compared to 0.76 and 0.59 for the walking group. Waist circumference difference for the tai chi group was -3.7cm compared to the control group; for the walking group, the difference was -4.1cm compared to the control group. Differences in lean mass were not significant. The results suggest that both tai chi and walking can produce moderate weight loss and can significantly improve waist circumference and fasting blood glucose.

Xu et al. [71] examined the combined effects of tai chi and weight loss on physical function and coronary heart disease risk factors. The 16-week study found that the tai chi group lost weight, while the control group did not ( $p = 0.006$ ). Physical function of the tai chi group improved significantly more than for the control group ( $p < 0.001$ ). The tai chi group also improved significantly in terms of physical functioning compared to the control group ( $p < 0.001$ ). The tai chi group also improved its sit-and-reach flexibility ( $p = 0.016$ ), body fat mass ( $p = 0.002$ ), waist circumference ( $p = 0.002$ ), systolic blood pressure ( $p < 0.001$ ), and diastolic blood pressure ( $p < 0.001$ ). The study concluded that the tai chi group intervention may represent an effective strategy for improving physical function and ameliorate CHD risk in the older adult population.

Qin et al. [72] reviewed several studies that employed various tai chi and qigong exercise sets that were employed in the treatment of obesity. Their goal was to determine which exercises were most beneficial for different obesity groups based on the differential characteristics of each group. In other words, they wanted to determine which exercise or group of exercises were most appropriate for each group, given the possibility that some exercises might be more beneficial for some groups than for others. The following exercises were included in the study:

1. Tai Chi
2. Ba Duan Jin
3. Yi Jin Jing
4. Wu Qin Xi
5. Shaolin Neigong
6. Liu Zi Jue
7. Others

Comparing results found that Tai Chi, Baduanjin, Yi JinJing and Wuqinxi were effective on strengthening the immune system. They also found that:

- Tai Chi was best at improving CD4+ and NK cells.
- Ba Duan Jin was best at improving CD3+ and CD8+ cells.
- Both Mawangdui Dao Yin and Da Wu could reduce TG, TC and LDL C and increase HDL C to some extent.

Another study [73] examined the effectiveness of martial arts exercise on anthropometric and body composition parameters of overweight and obese subjects. They reviewed six studies involving a total of 258 people. They found that martial arts exercises did not produce significantly different results in terms of body mass index, waist circumference and percentage of body fat when compared to the control group.

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