

Don't be fooled by what people say tai chi is, and what tai chi isn't. First, tai chi is a system of [theory](#), not an exercise or martial art. Roughly translated, tai chi means, "Supreme Ultimate." The best literary references for this are the "[Tao Te Ching](#)" and the "I-Ching."

Next, [Tai Chi Chuan](#) is the martial art based on "tai chi theory." It is one of the sisters of [Wudanquan martial arts](#). Because "tai chi" commonly refers to the exercise and martial art, we will do the same.

Tai chi isn't as old as some people profess. The oldest records of tai chi only date back to the early 1600's, to a tiny village in China called "[Chenjiagou](#)." The common story about the origin of tai chi coming from Zheng San Feng has been widely debunked with comprehensive articles like [Stanley Henning's "Ignorance, Legend and Taijiquan."](#)

However, do understand that tai chi is the culmination of 7000 years of [Taoist](#) research, [medical](#) practice, [breathing](#) technique, [movement](#) patterns, universal [theory](#) and [self-defense](#). It is the most developed and beneficial exercise in the world. [Time Magazine](#) called it "the perfect exercise."

It is commonly said that authentic tai chi masters are martial artists, and that their lineage is the first thing to consider. So if you start with the Chen Style tai chi, it would be the most authentic. Although Yang Style is the most popular, the real deal is hard to find. Yang Cheng Fu was ordered to teach the emperor's bodyguards and his personal army; Yang's response was to water down the forms and teach bogus tai chi. This tai chi is common Yang Style.

What makes good tai chi is adherence to a specific set of [principles](#).

[Master Fu](#) once said: **"More than 90 percent of all tai chi is bad. What it mean—'bad,' that when you see someone do tai chi, they don't follow the principles. You don't know the principles yet, but you can look for yourself if the tai chi is good or bad. When you look, look at the waist. When the tai chi is good, (they) always turn the waist. When the tai chi is bad, the arms move but the waist doesn't turn, or the waist only turns sometimes. That's principle. In good tai chi, the waist always turns."**

With practice of tai chi and the Wudang Internal arts, even someone sickly and weak can increase his or her performance to that of a high-level athlete. An athlete can increase his performance manyfold.

Tai Chi: "The Perfect Exercise"

Every day, a few hundred million people worldwide relax, move very slowly, breathe deeply and practice what is commonly known as "Tai Chi." Tai Chi, short for tai chi chuan, is a highly-developed form of movement that heals the body and enhances body skills such as balance and coordination. TIME Magazine calls Tai Chi "The Perfect Exercise." Although historic records only date the origin of Tai Chi to the 17th century, it comes as a result of more than 5000 years of Taoist research and development. Because of its endless benefits and lack of downside, Tai Chi is the best exercise in the world.

In order to assess what is good exercise and what is bad, we must first ask the question,

"Why do we exercise?" The primary reason we exercise is for aesthetics; we choose to "work out" to achieve absurd physical standards like muscle tone and fitness. "Muscle

tone” is merely an absence of body fat, while “fitness” can be easily connoted by its root word, “fit,” meaning how suitably clothing conforms to a wearer’s body. In other words, the main reason we exercise is to look good.

The second reason we exercise is for athletic performance. In the U.S. Air Force, they follow the moniker, “Fit to Fight.” While this “fitness” standard includes aesthetic standards like body-mass index and waist circumference measurement, it also includes performance standards like a timed 1.5-mile run, timed push-ups, and timed sit-ups. These three latter examples are minimum standards for performance, so that airmen have the physical ability to perform when a situation or duty demands it of them.

The third reason we exercise is for a more relative standard we term, “wellness.” This standard has to do with one’s relative state of immunity, mobility and mental health. In general medical doctors will recommend exercise for all three of these reasons, but likely, in reverse order.

If we exercise for these three reasons, we should ask the question,

“What’s wrong with common exercise?” Primarily, aesthetics shouldn’t matter. If a person can physically perform and has relative wellness, it shouldn’t matter if he or she is somewhat overweight or underweight. Some of the greatest athletes of all time have been overweight, such as Shaquille O’Neil, George Forman and Babe Ruth. Second, many of the common exercises people practice are damaging. Jogging has been proven damaging to the knees and hips; it will one day be shown to have damaging effects on the neck and spine. Weight lifting causes overeating; and it shortens the tendons, which leads to “muscle binding.” Crunches and

situps have shown to be bad for the lower back. And of course, all of these exercises are unsustainable, meaning by the time one is in his or her 50's, he will most likely stop practicing these exercises altogether.

As far as wellness, jogging has shown a diminishing return because the more one jogs, the more likely he or she is to get sick and depressed, and develop cancer. Overtraining with weights can cause a large array of problems like depression, chronic fatigue, insomnia, headaches, decreased immunity, irritability, and an increase in injuries. Both jogging and weight lifting reduce mobility later in life.

So if people can only exercise to the level they understand, and the common exercises like jogging and weight lifting are damaging, the next question we can ask is,

“What kind of exercise is better?”

Tai Chi is better. For aesthetics, tai chi practice will in fact reduce body fat significantly; but the tai chi masters don't care about that—it's just a by-product. A lack of body fat is not the only way to be beautiful. Better posture with more graceful movements is also beautiful. Happiness due to better health is clearly evident; people who practice Tai Chi seem to smile a lot. Also, Tai Chi practice improves the appearance of the skin, hair and nails.

For athletic performance, few exercises can match the benefits of Tai Chi. The specialized breathing training yields serious high endurance and aerobic threshold: regular practitioners can easily run 1.5 miles without practicing jogging. Tai chi is the standard for balance training. It also develops unparalleled “core strength” at the same time it yields flexibility in the waist and hips. The relaxing practice of

Tai Chi develops incredible accuracy, speed and power. This practice is not only sustainable through the entirety of one's lifetime, but it has no downside.

For wellness, nothing compares to Tai Chi practice. It is the panacea the world has been searching for. Studies have shown Tai Chi practice to boost the immune system in shingles patients 50 percent, a result that far exceeded all other test groups. There are studies on mental health, balance in fall victims, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, osteoporosis, autonomic nervous modulation, Parkinson's disease, breast cancer, gait and balance in peripheral neuropathy, differentiation and maturation of dendritic cells and much, much more.