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## Integrate Tai Chi into Your Daily Routine

Tai chi is a special form of exercise originating in ancient China. The name, tai chi, translates as 'Supreme Ultimate Exercise' or 'Skill'. Initially, it began as a martial arts practice but developed into forms that the ordinary person can easily adapt as part of a daily routine. Tai chi exercises consist of flowing, relaxed physical movements coordinated with the breath. This effectively links the body and mind in an effort to maintain optimum health.



There are many reasons to practice tai chi. The continuous, graceful exercises soothe a stressed-out mind and serve to strengthen the physical body. Circulation of the blood and fluids improves muscle tone and the ability to concentrate. The purpose of tai chi is to enhance energy levels without the use of external substances. One way to look at this is to compare waking up with a strong cup of coffee, as opposed to relying on your body's internal resources to start your day.

Tai chi exercises play out as an eye-pleasing dance in its elegance and grace. Performing them should bring satisfaction and joy. In this way, one can look forward to it and find relief from daily stress. This is different than the rush, or massive energy surge, experienced in competitive sports or other rigorous exercises. Tai chi is appropriate for all age groups and is very popular amongst seniors in China today.

Many forms of tai chi exist today and most emphasize the use of relatively easy motions. It doubles as a form of meditation to address issues of the mind. This makes it an excellent choice for those needing to unburden their minds from overthinking or anxious thoughts. A great time to practice is early morning, preferably before eating or after a light breakfast. However, there is really no bad time to practice, although it is not recommended right after a heavy meal.

The best way to get started is with a professional teacher. Usually, it is a group activity performed outside in a local park or outdoor setting. However, those options may not be viable for everyone. Luckily, there are simple, basic exercises that most people can safely perform on their own. Some are as easy as standing with the legs shoulder-width apart, as the arms swing slowly in large circles. Even 10 minutes a day of tai chi exercise can make a difference in someone's life.

The benefits will vary according to each individual. For example, an active young person with a taxing office job, who experiences acute stress in the form of 'butterflies in the stomach,' needs to reduce her anxiety. While practicing tai chi, she may feel that unpleasant sensation in her center dissipates, as her fluid movements help disperse energy more evenly through her body. This benefit can spread into other areas of her life, allowing her to fall asleep more easily or naturally desiring more nutritious foods.

To further assist her in falling asleep at night, a short set of the right tai chi exercises, as part of a bed-time ritual, may prove useful. As mentioned, correct breathing, timed with the physical movements, is key to

unlocking the full potential of this ancient art form. Perhaps motions which gently rock the body with a soothing, rhythmic pace can signal her mind to switch off, as her physical form prepares to slumber.

In other cases, tai chi may come in handy to help stave off unhealthy food cravings. Sometimes the lure of sweets is strong and a distraction may be in order. Many tai chi exercises do not require large spaces to practice, some can even be performed while sitting. Even while comfortably seated, movements that enlist only the arms and a concentration on the breath just might be enough to get someone to override the desire for a not-so-good choice in snacks.

To find out more about which tai chi exercises are perfect for you and your particular health issues, consult with your practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental Medicine to learn more about integrating the practice into your daily life.

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## Acupressure for a Quick Energy Boost

Feeling bogged down with stress, fatigue, and anxiety--and you haven't even gotten out of bed yet? If so, it sounds like you could use an infusion of endorphins. Endorphins are secreted in the brain and nervous system, and have the ability to reduce pain, enhance your sense of well-being and, under certain circumstances, produce a state of euphoria. Some researchers suggest that one way in which acupuncture works is through stimulating the release of endorphins.

Intense pain and stress will induce the release of endorphins. The question then is: how do you naturally stimulate the brain into releasing endorphins when you are not in a state of emergency, but still need a boost of energy? The following is a list of some healthy activities that may achieve this:

- **Acupuncture and acupressure treatments**
- **Meditation**
- **Laughter**
- **Deep breathing exercises**
- **Spicy food**
- **Chocolate**
- **Intense physical activity**

With so many reasons accounting for why a person's energy is not as high as it should be, finding a solution may prove elusive. According to acupuncture and Oriental medicine, a good place to start is by addressing the kidneys. The kidneys provide a powerful, fundamental energy from which the rest of the body draws from, and thus they are compared to a battery.

When the 'battery' is running low, it puts all the organs and systems of the body at risk of not having enough energy to adequately perform their jobs. However, when it is full, this helps ensure that all the processes needed to sustain life can carry on, including the manufacture and usage of endorphins.

Luckily, certain acupressure techniques can help revitalize the body quickly, by way of helping to strengthen the kidneys. These exercises can be self-applied and performed safely in the comfort of your home.

The first one is poetically called Beating the Heavenly Drum. Simply put your palms over your ears and let your index fingers rest at the base of your skull, on what is technically known as the occipital region. Begin tapping with moderate to heavy pressure--using your pointer fingers--up to 64 times. You can do eight sets, consisting of eight taps each. It was the rhythmic, soft noises emitted by the tapping that inspired the name of this exercise. Beating up on your own 'heavenly drum' helps stagnant energy flow freely, providing an energy boost to mind and body.

The next exercise can aid in stimulating a greater flow of Qi and blood into the kidneys. The general region where the kidneys sit is slightly above the waist, close to the spine, between the level of Thoracic vertebrae 12 (T12) and Lumbar vertebrae 3 (L3), to be specific. After you've located this area, make each hand into a

fist and vigorously rub up and down, as far as your wrists can comfortably handle, until you feel sufficient warmth is generated. Then, once again using your fists, pound on your back with moderate pressure in this same area.

You can either sit down and lean forward a little to perform this exercise, or you can stand up with your feet at shoulder-width apart. Although you only need to perform this exercise for one or two minutes at a time, you can do it several times a day. They can help prevent fatigue or give you a jolt of energy, if need be.

A full-body stretch can also help stuck energy flow anywhere in the body and only takes a few seconds to perform. Don't forget to stand on your tiptoes as you extend your arms and body to the sky.

## Acupressure for Allergy Relief

Allergies can be so unpredictable. You don't always know when and where they will strike. Popping allergy medicine can help, but there's a more natural and immediate way to find relief.

With acupressure, you let your fingers be your instruments of healing when you need to alleviate irritated eyes, runny nose and cough. You need your touch even more when you suffer sinus issues that range from facial pain and difficulty breathing through the nose to headaches and painful teeth.

A single acupressure point called Yin Tang is located on the forehead between the eyebrows, and it is a powerful form of relief. To enjoy the point's benefits, simply use the pads of your fingertips and massage the area between your brows.

One effective technique is to use your middle finger and make small circles without lifting your finger. Make the circles only as large as your skin can comfortably stretch. Feel free to engage in gentle acupressure at this site for as little as 30 seconds or for as long as 15 minutes. A lot of people find closing their eyes and relaxing into the activity provides the most relief.

All too often symptoms of allergies can include complications such as emotional stress or fatigue. Pressing on Yin Tang can harmonize the emotions and lessen anxiety, which are two things that contribute to a healthy immune system.

To add a part two to this exercise, run your fingers through your hair. Start above your eyebrows and trail your fingertips up to the hairline, then apply more vigorous pressure and scratch your skull. Try going forehead to neck, then reverse the order.

The next step is to keep up this lovely, scratching motion as you apply it to your temples. Run your hands on the sides of your head to the neck, and then back up again. When you have done this for a couple of minutes, give your neck a little stretch to the left, the right, and then forward and backward.

The general idea is to galvanize all your good, healing energy (Qi) and encourage it to circulate around your head. In this way, many local symptoms of allergies located on the head can be addressed.

To help address symptoms that originate further down the body, there are other acupressure exercises. In the case of coughing, wheezing or other respiratory symptoms, addressing the lungs is appropriate. For this exercise, you will need to locate your breastbone (sternum) and find your ribs.

The breastbone is what your ribs emanate from. You will need to explore your upper ribcage and find the intercostal spaces. These are the soft spaces in between your ribs. Sometimes they can feel a bit sore if you are experiencing allergy symptoms, so start with a delicate touch.

Use all four fingers on both hands to find your sternum and place each finger over an intercostal space. Your pointer fingers should lie just under your clavicles. Press as hard, or as soft, as you need. Pull your fingers slightly upwards as you follow the intercostal spaces.

If there's a point where a spot is crying out for more attention, linger for a few seconds as you make tiny

circular motions. By stimulating this area of the chest, Qi is delivered to the lungs. The energy generated from the acupressure can help break up phlegm and relieve coughing.

After you have massaged here, treat your lungs to at least three deep breaths. Try inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. You can experiment with this simple breathing exercise by not making any sounds as you do it. Finish by applying a minty chapstick on your lips. Mint has a dispersing quality that can help open up a stuffy nose.

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## Antioxidants to Reduce Respiratory Symptoms

Antioxidants are found in foods and produced in your body. They help defend your cells from free radicals. Without antioxidants, harmful molecules build-up, leading to cellular damage (oxidative stress).



Lifestyle habits, such as alcohol and tobacco use, and environmental air pollution contribute to the degeneration of cells, proteins, and DNA. Free radicals expedite the body's aging process, and conditions like heart disease, lung infection, and cancer are more likely to crop up.

Pulmonary oxidant stress can result in acute breathing problems, lung infections, inflammation, and other symptoms of pulmonary distress.

A diet rich in antioxidants is one way to build up your defenses. Vitamins C and E are powerhouses of nutrition. Upping your intake of these foods is a great start to supporting a healthy respiratory system.

Vitamin C is a water-soluble nutrient that is easily absorbed into the body and mobilizes quickly for immediate use. If you enjoy fruit, try sampling oranges, kiwis, lemons, guavas, grapefruit, watermelons, cantaloupe, mango, and pineapple.

Your vegetable options are just as varied. If you prefer hearty, fibrous, cruciferous veggies, opt for red and green cabbage, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts, bok choy, garden cress, and savoy cabbage. Or, you can try leafy greens like mustard, collard, kale, turnip greens, and spinach. Tomatoes, red peppers, yams, and sweet potatoes also provide significant amounts of vitamin C power.

Vitamin C can't be produced by the body and isn't stored for future use. Whatever the body doesn't use gets excreted, so replenish.

Vitamin E is a fat-soluble nutrient that sticks with you longer. It is stored in fat cells and the liver. While complimentary, this vitamin becomes counterproductive when consumed in large amounts.

Use wheat germ oil. Eat salmon, avocado, trout, mango, turnip greens, and kiwis. Munch on a handful of sunflower seeds, almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, Brazil nuts, and cashew nuts. A small handful of seeds and nuts are enough to derive nutritional benefits as they are chock full of antioxidants. Dry roasting them on a hot pan for a minute or two gives them a little extra flavor.

These are some foods that charge your body with antioxidants. If you want to find more options, you'll know them by their bright colors and variations. There are some darker foods and drinks that contain antioxidants. Red wine, black tea, dark chocolate, blackberries, cherries, and green tea all have an antioxidant called catechins.

With the variety of foods laden with rich antioxidants, enjoying your food while supporting your lung health is easy. For assistance in identifying nutrients that will best address your health concerns, talk to a practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine.

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