



# Tai Chi in VA -Fact Sheet

Integrative Health Coordinating Center-  
VHA Office of Patient Centered Care & Cultural Transformation

## Definitions:

**Tai Chi** is a mind-body exercise combining slow-flowing intentional movements with breathing, awareness and visualization. Rooted in the Asian traditions of martial arts, Chinese medicine and philosophy, Tai chi enhances relaxation, vitality, focus, posture, balance, strength, flexibility, and mood.

**Qigong** is an ancient Chinese healing art, older than, and similar to tai chi, with a focus of cultivating the body's vital energy or qi. It involves the coordination of the breath, posture, awareness, visualization and focused movements. Qigong may be a stationary or moving meditation.

## Background and Policy on in VA

Tai chi is one of the evidence-based complementary and integrative health (CIH) approaches within the VHA Whole Health System of care included in the Veteran's medical benefits package when deemed clinically necessary by his/her care team per VHA Directive 1137 – Provision of Complementary and Integrative Health, published in May 2017. Based on literature review these approaches were found to be safe and have sufficient evidence of benefit to be recommended as appropriate components of care for the Veteran population.

## Tai Chi Safety and Effectiveness

An evidence map of tai chi was developed by the VA Health Services Research & Development. This systematic review provides a visual map of the evidence of tai chi. Conditions with evidence of positive effect include general health and well-being, stress, fibromyalgia, chronic pain, balance, cardiovascular disease, COPD, osteoarthritis, cognitive function, osteoporosis, Parkinson's, stroke, mood dysfunction, and cancer. Tai Chi is generally thought to be safe and may be associated with minor musculoskeletal aches and pains including knee pain.

<https://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/publications/esp/taichi.cfm>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24878398>

## Occupational Guidance

Tai Chi Practice Leaders and Tai Chi Instructors teaching Tai Chi in VA require an understanding of the history of Tai Chi and Qigong, and the knowledge of key Tai Chi components, movements, biomechanics, breathing methods, and mind-body principles. Their qualifications differ in the number of hours of training and of teaching with Tai Chi Instructors having more hours of training and experience, and a broader scope of what they can provide than Tai Chi Practice Leaders.



## Treatment Guidance

Class intensity and duration will be adapted by the instructor based on Veterans' abilities.

In general, classes are 1 hour in length, offered 2-3 times a week for 12-24 weeks.

Reference: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4361587/>.

## TeleWholeHealth

A number of facilities are expanding access to tai chi and other CIH services using VA's Telehealth technology.

## Online Resources

Handouts and Experiential Videos <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/circle-of-health/moving-body.asp>

VHA Directive 1137: Provision of Complementary and Integrative Health:

[https://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub\\_ID=5401](https://www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=5401)