

I. Complete the gaps in the text (1-5) with the missing sentences (A-E):

Easing Ills through Tai Chi by Nell Porter Brown

<http://harvardmagazine.com/2010/01/researchers-study-tai-chi-benefits>

CATHERINE KERR has found an antidote for the hectic pace of laboratory life in the daily practice of tai chi. This centuries-old Chinese mind-body exercise, now gaining popularity in the United States, consists of slow-flowing, choreographed meditative movements with poetic names like “wave hands like clouds,” “dragons stirring up the wind,” and “swallow skimming the pond” that evoke the natural world. It also focuses on basic components of overall fitness: muscle strength, ***flexibility***, and balance.

1. ■ Although she also practices sitting meditation and does a lot of walking, she says that the impact of tai chi on her mood were so noticeable—even after she was diagnosed with a chronic immune system cancer—that she has devoted her professional life to studying the effects of mind-body exercise on the brain at Harvard’s Osher Research Center.

Kerr is careful to note that tai chi is “not a magic cure-all,” and that Western scientific understanding of its possible physiological benefits is still very rudimentary. Yet her own experience and exposure to research have convinced her that its benefits are very real—especially for older people too frail to engage in ***robust*** aerobic conditioning and for those suffering from impaired balance, joint ***stiffness***, or poor kinesthetic awareness.

For anyone who practices tai chi regularly, “brain plasticity arising from repeated training may be relevant, since we know that brain connections are ‘sculpted’ by daily experience and practice,” explains Kerr, who is investigating brain dynamics related to tai chi and mindfulness meditation at HMS. “Tai chi is a very interesting form of training because it combines a low-intensity aerobic exercise with a complex, learned, motor sequence. 2. ■

SCHOLARS SAY tai chi grew out of Chinese martial arts, although its exact history is not fully understood, according to one of Kerr’s colleagues, assistant professor of medicine Peter M. Wayne, who directs the tai chi and mind-body research program at the Osher Center. 3. ■ “Though these roots are thousands of years old, the formal name tai chi chuan was ***coined*** as recently as the seventeenth century as a new form of kung fu, which integrates mind-body principles into a martial art and exercise for health.”

Tai chi chuan is often translated as “supreme (grand) ultimate fist”: the first part (“tai chi”) refers to the ubiquitous dialectical interaction of ***complementary***, creative forces in the universe (yin and yang); the second, the fist, is what Wayne describes as the “manifestation or integration of these philosophical concepts into the body.”

4. ■ “While practicing, tai chi moves the chi and the blood and the sinews in the body

—purportedly correcting health imbalances,” adds Wayne, who has founded The Tree of Life Tai Chi Center, in Somerville, Massachusetts, where he also teaches. “One key principle of tai chi is analogous to the saying ‘A rolling stone gathers no moss,’—if you maintain inner mindful movement in the body, it may improve your health.”

Tai chi, considered a soft or internal form of martial art, has multiple long and short forms associated with the most popular styles taught: Wu, Yang, and Chen (named for their originators). Plenty of people practice the faster, more **combative** forms that appear to resemble kung fu, but the slower, meditative movements are what many in the United States—where the practice has gained ground during the last 25 years—commonly think of as tai chi.

Qigong, sometimes called the “grammar” of tai chi, comprises countless different smaller movements and breathing exercises that are often incorporated into a tai chi practice. **5.**

“Recent tai chi forms have even been developed for individuals to practice in wheelchairs. And although few formal medical-economic analyses have been conducted, tai chi appears to be relatively cost-effective.”

A. According to traditional Chinese medicine, when yin and yang come together they create a dynamic inner movement.

B. Meditation, motor learning, and attentional focus have all been shown in numerous studies to be associated with training-related changes—including, in some cases, changes in actual brain structure—in specific cortical regions.”

C. “One reason tai chi is popular is that it is adaptable and safe for people of all ages and stages of health,” Wayne points out.

D. “Doing tai chi makes me feel lighter on my feet,” says Kerr, a Harvard Medical School (HMS) instructor who has practiced for 15 years. “I’m stronger in my legs, more alert, more focused, and more relaxed—it just puts me in a better mood all around.”

E. “Tai chi’s roots are also intertwined with traditional Chinese medicine and philosophy, especially Taoism, and with another healing mind-body exercise called qigong,” he explains.

II. Match the underlined words with their definitions:

1. devised, created – about a new word or phrase (v.) - _____
2. militant; showing or having a willingness to fight (adj.) - _____
3. bending or twisting the body without injury (n.) - _____
4. strong and healthy (adj.) - _____
5. being inflexible and hard to bend (n.) - _____
6. acting as or providing a complement (adj.) - _____

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