

Tai Chi Versus Physical Therapy for Knee Osteoarthritis

The full report is titled
"Comparative Effectiveness
of Tai Chi Versus Physical
Therapy for Knee
Osteoarthritis.
A Randomized Trial."

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What is the problem and what is known about it so far?

Tai Chi is a traditional Chinese practice that combines deep breathing, gentle movements, awareness exercises, and meditation. An earlier study showed that patients with knee osteoarthritis who completed Tai Chi training had better pain control and physical functioning than those who participated in a wellness education and stretching program.

Why did the researchers do this particular study?

No previous trials have compared Tai Chi versus standard treatments for knee osteoarthritis.

Who was studied?

204 patients aged 40 years or older who had knee pain and documented osteoarthritis on x-rays of the knee.

How was the study done?

The patients were randomly assigned to group Tai Chi training (two 1-hour sessions each week for 12 weeks) or standard one-on-one physical therapy (two 30-minute sessions per week for 6 weeks and then 6 additional weeks of home-based exercises that were monitored by the research staff). Both groups were then encouraged to continue their Tai Chi practices or home exercises for a total of 52 weeks. The patients answered questions about their pain level, physical functioning, depression symptoms, and quality of life at baseline and at 12, 24, and 52 weeks.

What did the researchers find?

Patients in both groups had a decrease in their pain level at 12 weeks. The amount of change in pain between baseline and 12 weeks did not differ between the Tai Chi and physical therapy groups. Patients in both groups showed a similar improvement in physical functioning. Those in the Tai Chi group showed more improvement in their depression symptoms and quality of life than those in the physical therapy group.

What were the limitations of the study?

Patients in both groups were aware of the treatment they received.

What are the implications of the study?

Tai Chi training provided effects on pain and physical functioning that were similar to those with standard physical therapy for knee osteoarthritis.

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