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HEALTH & FITNESS

alternatives

Tai Chi

The force is with you.

The practice of tai chi promotes the circulation of Qi (life energy/force) within the body. Tai chi developed in China in about the 12th century C.E. Although tai chi started as self-defense practice, it has become widely used for health purposes as well.

Tai chi practitioners move their body in a series of movements. These movements make up forms in which each movement flows into the next. There are more than 100 possible movements. The simplest style of tai chi uses 13 movements; the more complex could have dozens. Tai chi is often called meditation in motion. Most forms are gentle and suitable for everyone. During practice, focus is on breathing and movement, which creates a state of relaxation and balance.

There are five major styles of tai chi, each named after the family that originated it. There are also a variety of offspring styles as well. Each style shares in their underlying theory and principles, but may offer different approaches to training. It is important to take into consideration, age and health as well as personal goals when choosing a style. For example, the Sun style is less strenuous than the Chen style and the Yang style promotes peace and tranquility.

The benefits of tai chi focus on three areas:

• **Health** — Tai chi focuses on concentration to relieve the effects of stress on the body and mind. According to mayoclinic.com, tai chi has been shown to reduce anxiety and depression, improve balance and coordination, improve sleep quality, lower blood pressure and improve cardiovascular fitness.

• **Meditation** — Tai chi facilitates

focus and calmness and is seen as necessary for maintaining optimum health and balance in the body.

• Martial Arts

— Many of the original movements of tai chi were developed as a martial arts form, emphasizing strength, balance, flexibility and speed. Through time, it has developed into a soft, slow and gentle form of exercise that can be practiced by people of all ages.

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) is sponsoring studies to find out more about tai chi's effects, how it works and diseases and conditions for which it may be helpful.

According to NCCAM, practitioners believe tai chi has many benefits, such as massaging the internal organs, aiding the exchange of gases in the lungs, helping the digestive system work better, increasing calmness and awareness and improving balance.

There are many great benefits to this Eastern system of practice. Tai chi classes are offered at health clubs, senior centers as well as self-standing studios in which people of all ages and health levels can participate. □

Julie Silver, MSW, Dipl. Ac., is a National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine board-certified acupuncturist and owner of Acupuncture Healthcare Associates of Michigan, a West Bloomfield holistic health clinic featuring acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine and naturopathic medicine. Her e-mail address is acuhealer@sbcglobal.net.

Back Breast Cancer Fight

Hillside Furniture is making it "stressless" to give this holiday season. Until Dec. 31, consumers will receive \$200 off the purchase price of a Stressless brand recliner from Ekornes Inc. when they donate a minimum of \$50 to the American Cancer Society for breast cancer research and support.

"It's the perfect way to pay it forward by helping others while also giving yourself or someone you love the gift of ultimate comfort this season," says Jeff Selik, president of Hillside Furniture. "With Ekornes' Stressless ergonomi-

cally designed seating, you can create a 'stressless comfort zone' in the privacy of your own home."

He said 2.4 million women living in the United States have been diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer.

"These are our mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. That is why Hillside Furniture selected this charity, to show these important women that, with our support, a cure is within our reach."

Hillside Furniture is located at 2300 Telegraph Road in Bloomfield Township. Visit www.hillsidefurniture.com/ekornes for information.



Julie Silver
Columnist