Alternative Options for Health: Tai Chi

A Tai Chi class at Eisenhower

For a great, low-impact exercise, consider Tai Chi. Practiced since the 12th century, this ancient Chinese martial art promotes the balanced flow of life energy or Qi (pronounced “chee”) throughout the body. This elegant form of physical poetry uses all centers of the body in a complementary combination of meditation, breathing and relaxation. Tai Chi can be practiced anywhere, and all you need are comfortable clothes and shoes.

The Chinese believe that when Qi flows properly, the mind, body and spirit are in balance. Following this principle, there are three major centers of focus in a Tai Chi session:

MOVEMENT — All of the major muscle groups and joints are needed for the slow, gentle movements in Tai Chi. Tai Chi improves balance, agility, strength, flexibility, stamina, muscle tone, and coordination. This low-impact, weight-bearing exercise strengthens bones and can slow bone loss.

MEDITATION — Meditation soothes the mind, enhances concentration, reduces anxiety, and lowers blood pressure and heart rate.

DEEP BREATHING — Exhaling stale air and toxins from the lungs while inhaling fresh air increases lung capacity, stretches the muscles involved in breathing, and releases tension. It also enhances blood circulation to the brain, which boosts mental alertness. At the same time, the entire body is supplied with fresh oxygen and nutrients.

Many Tai Chi movements mimic motions that are found in nature, which adds to the beauty and grace of the practice. It is easy to see the calm swaying motion of tall grasses gently blowing in the wind or the stance of a crane. The Chinese believe that by mimicking nature, human beings are united with the natural world. All of the movements are complementary to each other.When there is one movement, there is an equal and opposite movement to create balance.

HOW TO BEGIN PRACTICING TAI CHI The easiest way to learn Tai Chi is to take an hour-long class, once a week. Eisenhower Medical Center offers Tai Chi, refer to the Calendar of Events.

Healthy Living is a publication of Eisenhower Medical Center · © Copyright 2014 All Rights Reserved · www.emc.org