

Tai chi could be key to overcoming cognitive effects of chemotherapy

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According to the American Cancer Society, more than 11.4 million Americans are currently living with cancer. While cancer treatments are plentiful, many have negative side effects. Previous studies have indicated that a significant number of patients who receive chemotherapy also experience cognitive declines, including decreases in verbal fluency and memory. Now, one University of Missouri health psychologist has found evidence that indicates Tai Chi, a Chinese martial art, might help overcome some of those problems.

"Scientists have known for years that Tai Chi positively impacts physical and emotional health, but this small study also uncovered evidence that it might help [cognitive functioning](#) as well," said Stephanie Reid-Arndt, assistant professor and chair of the Department of [Health Psychology](#) in the School of Health Professions. "We know this activity can help people with their quality of life in general, and with this new study, we are encouraged about how Tai Chi could also help those who have received chemotherapy. I also hope this encourages more people to think about Tai Chi positively on a broader scale in their lives."

Tai Chi involves practicing slow motion routines and is based on several principles, including mindfulness, breathing awareness, active relaxation and slow movements. The emphasis on slow movement makes Tai Chi particularly suited to a wide range of [fitness levels](#), which makes it very relevant for those who have had chemotherapy and might be experiencing physical limitations as a result, Reid-Arndt said.

The MU [pilot study](#) followed a group of women with a history of chemotherapy. The women participated in a 60-minute Tai Chi class two times a week for 10 weeks. The women were tested on memory, language, attention, stress, mood and fatigue before and after the 10-week sessions. According to Reid-Arndt, the results of the tests indicated that the women had made significant improvements in their [psychological health](#) and cognitive abilities.

"Tai Chi really helps individuals focus their attention, and this study also demonstrates how good Tai Chi could be for anyone, whether or not they have undergone treatment for cancer," Reid-Arndt said. "Due to the small size of this study, we really need to test a larger group of individuals to gain a better understanding of the specific benefits of this activity for patients who have been treated with chemotherapy and how significant these improvements might be."

More information: The study was published recently in *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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