This Slow Movement Grows New Neurons and Repairs Old Ones

2 MIN READ

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BY HEATHER HURLOCK

You’ve probably heard that traditional Chinese exercises like Tai Chi and Qigong are *good for you.*

They’re slow, graceful, and kind of meditative, sure, but maybe you’ve wondered if they *really* do anything beyond helping you feel a little calmer or more flexible.

Turns out something is happening *deep under the hood.*

A new meta-analysis in the ***Journal of Exercise Science & Fitness*** pulled together data from 11 randomized controlled trials and found that traditional Chinese exercises (TCEs, for short) significantly increase **brain-derived neurotrophic factor** (BDNF) in middle-aged and older adults. Why does that matter? Because BDNF is like Miracle-Gro for your brain. It helps grow new neurons, repair old ones, and keep your cognitive functions sharp as you age.

BDNF is closely linked to learning, memory, and neuroplasticity, your brain’s ability to adapt and change. Low levels have been associated with Alzheimer’s, depression, and cognitive decline. So the fact that something as low-impact and accessible as Tai Chi can help boost it? That’s kind of major.

The Exercise Technique That Sharpens Your Mind

Traditional Chinese exercises like Tai Chi and Qigong integrate breathing, intentional

movement, and mental focus. This trifecta seems to activate the body's parasympathetic nervous system (the "rest and restore" mode), while subtly challenging balance, coordination, and attention. The result is a kind of moving mindfulness that appears to shift brain chemistry in your favor.

What makes this study especially compelling is the population: healthy adults over 45. So we're not just talking about people recovering from illness or already in cognitive decline, we're talking about prevention and optimization in the prime of life.

This isn't the first time TCEs have shown promising brain benefits. Other studies have linked Tai Chi to:

1. Improved Working Memory and Executive Function:

- A **meta-analysis of 20 studies indicated that Tai Ch**i enhances executive function—which includes abilities like multitasking, time management, and decision-making—in individuals without cognitive decline.

2. Reduced Inflammation Markers Impacting Brain Health:

- Research suggests that Tai Chi can **improve cognitive functions and alleviate symptoms** of mild cognitive impairment by modulating inflammation factors

3. Better Sleep, Supporting BDNF Production and Memory Consolidation:

- Regular exercise, including practices like Tai Chi, can indirectly boost memory and thinking skills by **improving mood and sleep**, and by reducing stress and anxiety.

Even the **Mayo Clinic has called Tai Chi "meditation in motion,"** noting its role in reducing stress and improving mood.

Tai Chi For Beginners

These ancient practices aren't just about "balance" in the philosophical sense—they're turning out to be legit tools for brain longevity. And for those of us who want to stay sharp, curious, and vibrant deep into our later decades, that's a serious win. **Here's an overview of the top Tai Chi moves for beginners**. *Your move.*

The best part? You don't need to train for a marathon or even break a sweat. Just 20 to 40 minutes a few times a week seems to be enough to see benefits. Bonus points if you practice outside—sunshine, nature, and gentle movement make an excellent neuroprotective cocktail.

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WRITTEN BY:



Heather Hurlock