

# Using Tai Chi and Qigong to Treat Cancer Symptoms

**Robert W McGee\***

Fayetteville State University, USA

\*Corresponding author: Robert W McGee, Fayetteville State University, North Carolina, USA



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## ABSTRACT

Qigong has been a tool in the Traditional Chinese Medicine [TCM] toolbox for thousands of years. Tai chi is another related tool that is of more recent origin. Although these two types of moving meditation-type exercises have been widely known and used in China and other parts of Asia, they have become more popular as supplementary therapies for a wide range of ailments in the west only more recently. The present article reviews the results of the application of tai chi and qigong to the treatment of cancer patients. Several studies have found that the addition of tai chi or qigong to the treatment of cancer can result in significant improvement in the areas of depression, fatigue, sleep quality, anxiety, and overall quality of life.

## Introduction

Tai chi is both a Chinese martial art and a form of moving meditation, a kind of mindfulness exercise. It is considered an internal martial art, as compared to kung fu, which is mostly an external martial art. Whereas kung fu focuses on external movements, tai chi focuses more on breathing and mindfulness. Qigong is a close relative of tai chi. Although not a martial art, it is also a form of moving meditation. They both are gentle forms of exercise that activate the body's natural energy, awaken the immune system, and provide a vast array of health benefits. Including tai chi or qigong as a supplement to the treatment of a wide range of ailments has been shown to often be significantly effective [1-17]. Numerous studies have found that including tai chi or qigong into a cancer treatment program can produce significant benefits [7,10]. This brief article summarizes a few of those studies.

## Case Studies

Wayne, et al. [18] summarized and critically evaluated the effects of qigong and tai chi on quality of life and symptoms of cancer survivors. They analyzed the results of 22 clinical studies on lymphoma, breast, lung and prostate cancer and the effect that the addition of tai chi or qigong had on the treatment of various cancer symptoms. Treatment ranged from 3 to 12 weeks, depending on the

study. The studies found significant improvement in depression ( $p = 0.001$ ), fatigue ( $p < 0.001$ ), sleep difficulty ( $p = 0.018$ ) and overall quality of life ( $p = 0.004$ ). Although the degree of pain declined, the change was not quite significant ( $p = 0.136$ ). Zeng, et al. [19] published an updated systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of tai chi and qigong on the treatment of cancer symptoms and found that their inclusion into a cancer treatment program produced significant improvement in the symptoms of fatigue and sleep quality. There were also positive but nonsignificant trends for anxiety, depression, and overall quality of life. Deng [20] found that the introduction of qigong can relieve anxiety and mood changes in cancer patients, although it did not necessarily have a significant effect on pain reduction. Maindet, et al. [21] found that the addition of tai chi or qigong into a post-cancer treatment program can be efficient in reducing the severity of pain as well as anxiety, depression, mood disturbances and stress. Kuo, et al. [22] examined the effects of baduanjin, perhaps the most popular qigong exercise, on cancer patient symptoms.

They conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of 10 studies using randomized controlled trials to determine the effects this exercise set had on a range of symptoms. Those studies found that including baduanjin in the patients' cancer

treatment regimen produced significant results in fatigue, sleep quality and overall quality of life. Lu, et al. [23] Examined the effects of including baduanjin into the treatment of cancer-related fatigue in patients having colorectal cancer who were undergoing chemotherapy. There were no significant differences in cancer-related fatigue (CRF) between the two groups at baseline and after 12 weeks. However, after 24 weeks, the percentage of patients in the baduanjin group who experienced moderate to severe CRF was significantly smaller than for those in the control group. They concluded that the introduction of baduanjin exercises can relieve CRF in patients having colorectal cancer who are undergoing chemotherapy. It can also improve their physical activity level and sleep quality. Many more studies have been conducted in recent years on the effectiveness of qigong and tai chi in the treatment of cancer symptoms. The studies discussed above are merely a representative sample [24-61].

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## Conflict of Interest

None.

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