

Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Treatment of Cancer

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has been in existence for thousands of years. Some of its subfields include herbal treatments, acupuncture, acupressure, tai chi and qigong. This article reviews some studies where tai chi and qigong have been used to treat a wide variety of cancer patients.

Keywords: Cancer; Tai Chi; Qigong; Traditional Chinese Medicine; TCM

Introduction

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has been in existence for thousands of years. Not much has been known about it in the West until recent years. However, in the last few decades, its popularity in the West has grown, and much literature about it is now available in the English language [1-31]. In China and some other Asian countries, it has been used to treat a wide variety of ailments and diseases, including arthritis [32], anxiety and depression [33], cognitive impairment [34], hypertension [35], and cancer [36-49]. It has also been used to treat patients having Covid-19 [50,51]. It might even be effective in the treatment of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) [52], although not much research has been done in this area. Traditional Chinese Medicine has several subbranches, including herbs, acupuncture, acupressure, qigong and tai chi. This article focuses on the treatment of various kinds of cancer using qigong and tai chi. Tai chi is a subbranch of kung-fu, a form of Chinese martial arts. However, the practice of tai chi has numerous health benefits. It is a form of moving (dynamic) meditation. Studies have found that it is helpful in treating a wide range of diseases, although becoming a tai chi expert takes years of dedication practice. Luckily, one need not become a tai chi expert in order to reap the health benefits of tai chi. Studies that have incorporated tai chi into a

health regimen have often taught it to patients who have had no prior exposure to tai chi.

All tai chi incorporates qigong (a.k.a. chi gong or chi kung), which is a series of easy to learn gentle exercises that activate the body's natural healing powers. One may practice qigong without learning the complicated tai chi movements. It is much easier to learn qigong than tai chi, and one may derive major health benefits from the regular practice of qigong while having a sloppy style because most of the health benefits derived from practicing qigong are from the meditative aspects of the art and the breathing. One qigong teacher has said that qigong is 60 percent meditation, 30 percent breathing and only 10 percent form. He even gives his students permission to butcher the form, since the form itself is the least important part of qigong [53].

Cancer Studies

Many studies have found that tai chi and qigong have been used to successfully treat a wide variety of cancer patients, often, but not always in conjunction with Western medicine. Generally, these TCM techniques have been used to partially alleviate the adverse side-effects of western cancer treatments, such as nausea and

depression, and have often improved the quality of life, although at least one qigong practitioner claims that the practice of qigong has actually cured her of stage three lymphoma [54]. Qigong and tai chi have been used successfully in the treatment of breast cancer [55-64], cognitive impairment [65,66], colorectal cancer [67,68], fatigue [69-71], gastrointestinal cancer [72], hematological malignancies [73], the immune system [74], pain management [75-77], quality of life [78-83], sleep disturbance [84], and symptom management [85], usually in conjunction with Western medicine, although some Asian studies have found that tai chi and qigong have been effective when used alone. In fact, some Chinese hospitals are devoted entirely to treatment of cancer and other diseases using tai chi and/or qigong exclusively.

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