Tai Chi
a Beneficial Exercise for Seniors

More and more seniors are becoming physically active – reaping the countless health benefits associated with regular exercise. If power walking and your run-of-the-mill strength building exercises are uninteresting, the no-impact Chinese exercise of Tai Chi is an excellent way to tone muscle, increase endurance, and gain balance.

In a study in *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, researchers concluded that the movements associated with Tai Chi helped seniors improve physical function. Study participants who took Tai Chi twice a week for a six-month period noticed a significant improvement in their ability to accomplish daily tasks such as carrying groceries, walking up stairs, or moving medium-sized objects.

A self-paced and self-controlled activity such as Tai Chi has the potential to be an effective, low-cost means of improving physical function in older persons. Most notably, the study showed, was that those who took Tai Chi were less-likely to fall – one of the largest causes of serious injury for seniors.

The movements of Tai Chi combine the elements of balance, toning

and aerobic exercises, through slow, graceful actions. When practiced regularly, Tai Chi positively affects overall health and well-being. Improving flexibility and balance aids in preventing serious falls. Practicing Tai Chi also helps to develop stronger lungs – to walk without becoming winded – and improved leg strength – to more easily rise from a seated position.

Tai Chi has three major components: movement, meditation, and deep breathing. All major muscle groups are utilized to articulate the gentle, slow movements of Tai Chi. The exercise movements improve strength, flexibility, coordination, and muscle tone. The exercise may help slow bone loss and osteoporosis.

The meditative aspect of Tai Chi soothes the mind, reduces anxiety, enhances concentration, and lowers blood pressure. The deep breathing aspect releases tension, enhances blood circulation to the brain, and supplies the body with fresh oxygen.

For older adults seeking an effective, no-impact exercise with a multitude of benefits, Tai Chi is an excellent choice to free the mind and energize the body.

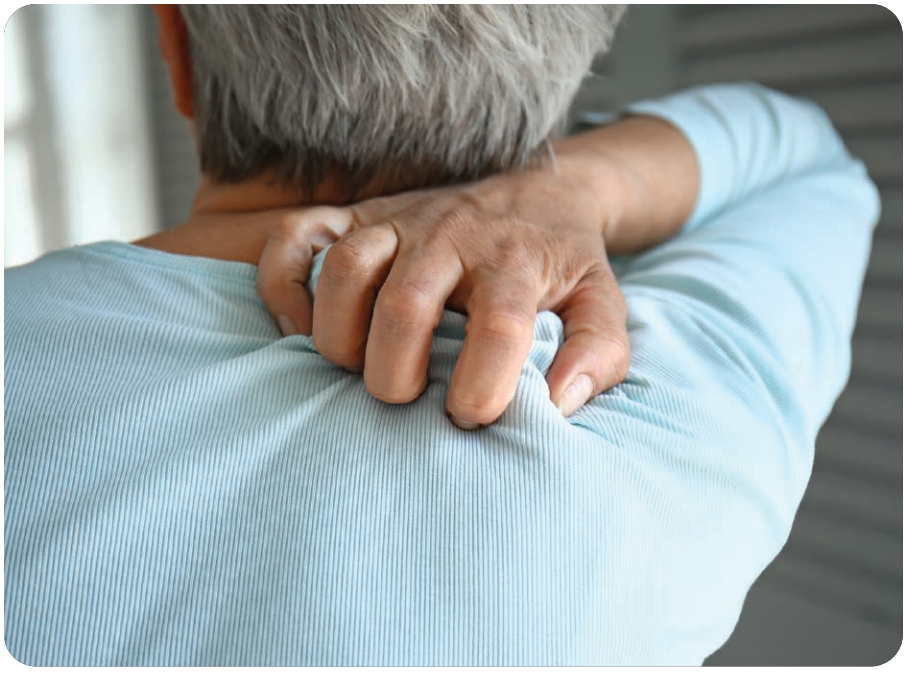
Them Bones, Them Bones, Them Dry Bones.

Dry brittle bones are exactly what we don't want as we age, but osteoporosis is a disease that plagues many of us in our later years… particularly women.

A disease that strikes when the density of bone in the body decreases, osteoporosis leaves the remaining bone weak and in danger of fracturing. Once thought to be an unavoidable part of aging, we now know that osteoporosis is preventable.

Bones grow most from the time we're born until we are in our 20s. During that period particularly, in order to develop strong bones, our bodies need good nutrition, a lot of calcium, and weight-bearing exercise.

Low calcium intake during these peak bone-building years can lead to osteoporosis later in life.



Encourage your children and grandchildren to drink low fat milk, calcium-fortified juices, and smoothies made with milk or low-fat yogurt to ensure that they develop healthy bones for life.

What if you're older? Can calcium still help prevent osteoporosis? The answer is: better late than never. Adding more calcium to your diet can help at any age. Calcium supplements should only be used to fill the gap between your daily calcium goal and the calcium you get from your diet. Because healthy foods and beverages contain many more nutritious elements than calcium pills, concentrate on boosting your dietary intake. Calcium-fortified orange juice, some cheeses, beans, spinach, rhubarb, almonds, and other calcium-fortified products are also great choices to provide the calcium your bones need.

If you aren't getting enough calcium in your diet, your doctor may recommend a supplement. The two most common ones are calcium carbonate and calcium citrate.

Because our bodies can only absorb 500-600 mg of calcium at a time, it's important to space out your calcium intake throughout the day. For example, if you're having calcium-fortified orange juice and using milk on your breakfast cereal, don't take a calcium supplement as well. Wait until midmorning or have it with an afternoon snack.

The other important weapon in the battle against bone loss is exercise. Weight-bearing physical activity plays a significant role in keeping your bones healthy, at any age. Weight-bearing activity compels your muscles and bones to work against the forces of gravity. Think about adding jogging, brisk walking, stair climbing or dancing to your list of leisure activities.

The key to fighting osteoporosis is early detection, but because there are often few warning signs, the onset of the disease is easily overlooked. Subtle signs to watch for include a decrease in height, stooped posture, back pain and clothes that no longer fit well. If you suspect that you may be developing osteoporosis, ask your doctor about a bone density test.