

## ***Active Living with Arthritis Podcast #12*** **Beyond Walking and Strengthening: Tai Chi, Yoga, and Water Aerobics**

*Karen:* Welcome to another Active Living with Arthritis podcast, presented by ENACT center at Boston University as part of our Interact with ENACT series. We're here to bring you evidence-based information related to arthritis and rehabilitation. Make sure to subscribe to our podcasts to receive episodes as they're produced. I'm Dr. Karen Jacobs, an Occupational Therapist, professor in occupational therapy at Boston University, and your host for this podcast about additional ways to exercise. I'm here today with Amber Steckel and Kaitlin Thompson, candidates for the Doctor of Physical Therapy degree at Boston University. In previous ENACT podcasts, we discussed walking and strengthening as good forms of exercise for people with arthritis. For those who are looking for more ways to exercise, today we will be discussing Tai Chi, yoga, and water aerobics.

Kaitlin, can you briefly review the current exercise guidelines?

*Kaitlin:* Sure. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or the CDC, recommend 150 mins of moderate aerobic exercise and at least two days of muscle-strengthening that targets the major muscle groups per week. This can be overwhelming at first, so don't be discouraged. Even a little exercise is better than none. If you are not meeting the guidelines, even doing some exercise can improve your health.

*Karen:* I'm going to walk the steps after this! What types of exercise can people do, Kaitlin?

*Kaitlin:* Walking and strengthening are the two most frequently studied types of exercise among people with knee osteoarthritis. But there are others that people can try. The ones we will talk about in this podcast are Tai Chi, yoga, and water aerobics.

*Karen:* Great! Amber, can you tell us what Tai Chi is?

*Amber:* Sure. Tai Chi features smooth, and coordinated movements of different body parts, and slowly stretching one's arms and legs. It is a great form of exercise because it incorporates balance and strengthening into one activity. This can not only help with arthritis symptoms, but can also help prevent falls.

*Karen:* OK, that's great, but what did you find to support Tai Chi for arthritis clients, Amber?

*Amber:* That's a good question, Karen! There are a few studies on Tai Chi. They generally show small improvements in pain and physical function in people with knee osteoarthritis. Tai Chi has also been proven to reduce the risk of falls in older adults. The most effective Tai Chi programs are 60 minutes, twice a week, for at least 12 weeks. Tai Chi classes are available at most community centers and gyms, also making it a fun group activity. Hip arthritis and Tai Chi have not been studied yet. However, based on what we know about Tai Chi and hip osteoarthritis, it's likely that the benefits will be similar to knee osteoarthritis.

*Karen:* That's really interesting. So how can people get started on Tai Chi, Kaitlin?

*Kaitlin:* Tai Chi is offered in many senior centers and community exercise facilities. The national Arthritis Foundation also offers a Tai Chi exercise video for home use. Additionally, local state chapters of the Arthritis Foundation may be able to recommend places that offer Tai Chi to people with arthritis. Their website can be found in the show notes for your reference.

*Karen:* That's great! Tai Chi sounds sort of like yoga. Does yoga help people with arthritis too? Amber, what do you think?

*Amber:* Yes, Karen. There are a few studies on yoga and the results are similar to Tai Chi. Yoga can also decrease pain and improve physical

functioning for patients with knee osteoarthritis. However, evidence to support this remains limited. The best research shows that daily yoga sessions can decrease pain and stiffness, increase range of motion and flexibility, and enable people to walk longer distances. As with Tai Chi, yoga has not been studied in relation to hip osteoarthritis. However, from what we know, we can expect similar findings to knee osteoarthritis.

*Karen:* You know, I've been doing yoga for a while, and I also find that it's very relaxing. What other activities did you look into, Kaitlin?

*Kaitlin:* Water aerobics is another activity that can be good for some people with arthritis. People who are overweight, or those who cannot tolerate more than 10 minutes of exercise on land, benefit most from exercise in water. In addition, water aerobics can be very good for someone with joint malalignment. Joint malalignment occurs when bones don't line up correctly inside the joint. This can create more stress on parts of the joint which are already damaged. When exercising in water, the joints become unloaded and it can be less painful than doing land-based exercise. This is why water aerobics can be very good for some people with arthritis.

*Karen:* Water aerobics sound like a good alternative for some people. I've actually tried it myself, and really enjoyed it. But, how effective is it? Amber, can you answer that question ?

*Amber:* Just like any aerobic activity, water aerobics can improve strength and endurance, as well as help to manage weight. Most research suggests that land-based exercise has the same beneficial effects of strengthening, endurance, and flexibility as water aerobics. The only difference is that people who are overweight may experience a greater decrease in pain right after doing exercise in water. However, exercise in water is not as supported by evidence as exercise on land, like walking and strengthening. In fact, Tai Chi, yoga, and water aerobics all have weak evidence compared to land-based exercise.

*Karen:* Amber, that's really a great point. Kaitlin, What would you recommend in regards to Tai Chi, Yoga, and water aerobics then?

*Kaitlin:* Well, as Amber said, the evidence for Tai Chi, yoga, and water aerobics is not as strong as for land-based exercise, like walking and strengthening. If you really like Tai Chi, yoga, or water aerobics, that's great. But you might want to add in some strengthening and walking exercises to get additional benefits. However, any activity is good as long as it's done safely for your joints. Some Tai Chi and yoga positions *do* need to be modified to keep the joints safe. Your Tai Chi or yoga instructor may be able to help you with this. If you begin trying these activities and find that they are giving you more joint pain or problems, consult with a physical therapist or occupational therapist to create a safer program for you.

*Karen:* Thank you, Kaitlin and Amber, for providing so much information on these activities.

We hope you enjoyed this podcast, and we thank you for listening! If you'd like to offer feedback, ask questions, or let us know of topics that you're interested in, please send an email to enact (e-n-a-c-t) @ bu.edu. On our website- [www.bu.edu/enact](http://www.bu.edu/enact) we have a copy of today's show notes, information about the center, and a list of online resources. In our next podcast, we will discuss common how to modify activities like golf, tennis, and gardening, for someone with knee osteoarthritis.

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