

# American Academy of Pain Management

## 14<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CLINICAL MEETING

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Topic: Tai Chi Chuan

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### How to Choose a Tai Chi Chuan Class and Instructor

1. **Instructor.** Look for someone who has studied it for a number of years (At least four years or more) before they started teaching. Tai Chi Chuan is a martial art and many times it is listed under either Karate or Martial Arts in the Yellow Pages. If the instructor has a long list of different martial arts that have been studied, there is a high probability that justice has not been done to any one of them. There is no belt ranking system in Tai Chi Chuan. Be cautious of someone who professes to have earned a Black Belt in Tai Chi Chuan. There is no such thing. The age, gender or ethnic background of the instructor has nothing to do with his or her abilities. There are many Chinese who profess to know Tai Chi Chuan when in reality they do not. If possible visit more than one school/instructor and choose one that meets your needs.
2. **Can I Learn It From a Book or video?** It is almost impossible to learn Tai Chi Chuan from a book or video. The movements need to be done precisely to gain the desired benefit. Only a qualified instructor would know about knee positioning to avoid injury. The videos and books should be used only in conjunction with a class or as a review.
3. **Uniforms.** It is not necessary to buy a uniform to do Tai Chi Chuan. Some instructors request that you purchase one to maintain clinic/school spirit. Many clinics/schools have an inexpensive T-shirt. All that is needed is loose fitting clothes. Blue jeans are usually too tight. You will find that socks and flat canvas shoes with rubber or cloth soles is ideal for doing Tai Chi Chuan. The flatter the shoes the better it is for practicing. Running shoes usually do not work well for Tai Chi Chuan.
4. **Cost.** The cost should range anywhere from \$5.00 per lesson up to \$25.00 per lesson for group lessons. Some instructors require students to sign contracts. These contracts are one-sided contracts that obligate the student to pay whether or not the student continues. Try to avoid signing any contract. In lieu of contracts some instructors require the students to pay in advance for increments of three or four months at a time. This is acceptable and far more reasonable than contracts. Some instructors teach on a private basis, and the cost for private lessons can vary substantially from one instructor to another. Expect to pay much more for private lessons.

5. **Class Size.** Class size should be limited to the number of students that the instructor can teach comfortably. A good rule of thumb is that an individual instructor should be able to teach a group of 25-30 students in about 1000-1200 square feet. Once you get past 40 students in a group it becomes difficult for instructors to give adequate attention to each student.
6. **Teaching Method.** Some instructors will allow you to join into a class at any time. If there are many people in the class then the instructor must rotate from one student or group of students to another. This allows the instructor to give individual attention to one student for only a short period of time. When the instructor moves on to the next student then you are on your own. There is little time to ask questions. If you are a fast learner, this is a very good method of learning. The other method of teaching is for the instructor to start a class only with beginners who have no knowledge of Tai Chi Chuan. The class progresses as a unit. The instructor is able to watch all students and correct those who make mistakes. This can be a slow way of learning Tai Chi Chuan, as the instructor has a tendency to teach according to the speed and ability of the slowest student. However, it is a good way of teaching to a group of students that need extra time or needs. This method of teaching fits well into a pain management practice.
7. **Frequency of Lessons.** Some instructors have the students come to class two or three times per week, while others have their students come only once a week. Naturally the more that you come the more you are going to learn. However, there are a number of factors that come into play. First, progress is due to ones individual practice not necessarily the quantity of material learned. Second, sometimes new body movements or sequences are difficult for individuals to learn especially the elderly. Third, most people do not have the time to go to class more than once a week. There is nothing wrong with coming once a week for lessons and practicing regularly at home until the next lesson. In a pain management clinic there can be daily or weekly lessons depending on the focus of the group.
8. **Practice.** If you want to learn Tai Chi Chuan you must practice at home regularly. If you do not practice at home it will be readily apparent to both you and the instructor that you did not practice. In the beginning you should practice at least 15 minutes to one half hour per day. Later as you learn more movements you should practice at least one half hour per day. The more practice the more benefits you will derive.
9. **What Style should one study?** The most popular styles of Tai Chi Chuan are Chen, Yang, Wu, Sun, and Hao. There are many variations within each of these categories and there are combinations. A long form of Tai Chi Chuan may take up to two years to learn going to class once a week. There are short forms of Tai Chi Chuan. One of the most popular styles is referred to as the 24 Move Short Form. It is easy to learn and is composed of all the basic movements of Tai Chi Chuan. It would take about 12-24 lessons to learn the whole form. It is an excellent introduction to learning Tai Chi Chuan. This 24 Move Style of Tai Chi Chuan fits well into a pain management practice.
10. **Martial Art or Exercise?** Tai Chi Chuan was originally created as a martial art. It has evolved into an exercise that is part of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). It is taught in many of the schools and colleges of Oriental Medicine. Those instructors that know it as a martial art have a deeper understanding of the art than those that learned it as an exercise. Some instructors will emphasize the martial art qualities while others will only allude to this aspect. If you are interested in Tai Chi Chuan as a therapeutic exercise that can be incorporated into a pain management clinic than choose an instructor that knows it as a martial art, and is willing to teach it as a therapeutic exercise. If you can find someone that knows it as a martial art, and is also a licensed acupuncturist this would be a big plus because he/she could explain the energy flow concepts of the movements.

**11. Benefits of Tai Chi Chuan** Tai Chi Chuan can be practiced by young or old, tall or short, male or female, strong or weak. It is an excellent way to develop physical strength and flexibility after surgery or trauma. It fits well into a pain management protocol. The underlying energy concepts of Tai Chi Chuan are the same as acupuncture. Acupuncture uses needles to balance internal energy, while Tai Chi Chuan uses movement to accomplish the same thing. Incorporating Tai Chi Chuan into a pain management practice is a winning combination for the practitioner and the patient.

**12. Who Will Benefit Most** Everyone will benefit from Tai Chi Chuan. Within a pain management environment patients with arthritis, joint problems, low back pain, fibromyalgia, and MS seem to do very well. Most see an improvement in their symptoms when they do regular practice.

**13. Here are the questions to ask**

- Who did you study from?
- How long have you been studying Tai Chi Chuan?
- Do you know the martial art aspect of Tai Chi Chuan?
- What style of Tai Chi Chuan do you know?
- How long have you been teaching?
- How much does it cost?
- Do I have to sign a contract?
- How many are in a class?
- Do I have to buy a uniform?
- How often do I have to come to class?
- Are you a licensed acupuncturist?
- Do you teach privately?
- Do you have make up lessons if I miss a class?
- Will you be teaching the class or will one of your students do the teaching?
- How long will it take me to learn the form that you teach?
- If you have special needs ask if they will be addressed.
- Will everyone in the class be my age?

**If you would like more information on Tai Chi Chuan or the name of an instructor in your area you can contact us at:**

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