Tai Chi Improves Balance in Parkinson Disease

March 02, 2012
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Tai chi training appears to be effective as a stand-alone behavioral intervention for reducing balance impairments in patients who have mild to moderate Parkinson disease. Improved functional capacity and reduced incidence of falls are other potential benefits.

Li and associates conducted a randomized controlled trial of 195 patients to compare the effects of exercise at 6 months in those assigned to twice-weekly tai chi classes with those in resistance-training or stretching groups. The primary outcomes were indicators of postural stability—maximum excursion and directional control. Secondary outcomes included measures of gait and strength and number of falls.

The tai chi group performed consistently better than the resistance-training and stretching groups in maximum excursion and in directional control. The tai chi group also performed better than the stretching group in all secondary outcomes and outperformed the resistance-training group in stride length and functional reach. The incidence of falls was lower in the tai chi group than in the other groups. The effects of tai chi training were maintained at 3 months after the intervention. No serious adverse events were observed.

The authors noted that the changes resulting from tai chi training indicate increased potential for effectively performing activities of daily living.

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