

## A HEALTHY NEW YEAR

## Physically Celebrate the Year of the Tiger

## ■ A Good Time for T'ai Chi Ch'uan

By MARILYN COOPER  
Contributing Writer

T'ai Chi Ch'uan is considered 600 years old and means "Grand Ultimate Fist." It evolved from Shaolin Kung Fu. Shaolin proceeded Tai Chi in the history of Chinese martial arts by about 1,000 years.

Far older than either of these is Qigong, the pure healing art, which predates written history and is considered 6,000 years old. Tai Chi is the integration of qigong and kung fu, both healing and martial. Qigong is usually taught in conjunction with Tai Chi.

T'ai Chi Ch'uan increases circulation, flexibility, strength, bone density, balance, immunity, awareness, and good spirits. The continuous slowness distinguishes Tai Chi from all other types of exercise. While Yoga holds and relaxes into each pose, Tai Chi flows from one posture into the next, requiring a more alert and poised state.

Tai Chi engages the mind and body in equal measure. The mind directs the body to move in accordance with specific guidelines -- a slow, constant pace with the weight sunk, the body very relaxed, and the stepping light. The mind has time to reflect on each movement as it is occurring. The heightening awareness produces a deeply meditative experience. Students develop

strength, grace and self-control without straining or risking injury.

The initial learning stages are mentally challenging. The dropout ratio in Tai Chi compared to Pilates or Yoga is staggering. The few who remain reap incomparable rewards -- longevity, protection from illness, injury and assault, and a practice that integrates the spiritual with the physical.

Like learning a new (body) language, once there is a basic vocabulary, the mind/body can express things that would've been inconceivable without Tai Chi training -- the ability to respond to pressure without resisting, and to move said force or pressure in the direction it was going.

Tai Chi can be practiced anywhere and at any time of day. All that is needed is a small space, a desire to feel better and the understanding that one can heal, elevate and strengthen her or himself at will. This process is called "Cultivating Qi."

I have used Tai Chi as a primary practice in my 40s, 50s and now 60s. My form has improved over the decades, as has my energy levels, and general health, making my old age vibrant and exciting. I look forward to sharing my "qi" and knowledge with people of all ages and fitness levels.

*Marilyn Cooper is an international gold medalist in Tai Chi. She teaches classes at the Orinda Community Center and In Forma Health Club. For more information, call 925-818-8155 or go to [www.littliverivest.com](http://www.littliverivest.com).*



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Marilyn Cooper demonstrates the "Low Tiger" pose in celebration of Chinese New Year, the Year of the Tiger, which falls on February 14 this year.

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Tai Chi Classes at In Forma and Orinda Community Center

## Move of the Month

Ball Bosu squat

Stand on a Bosu with arms overhead, holding a medicine ball.

Slowly lower arms straight down to chest level.

Squat down, bend forward slightly from hips, and do not allow your knees to go past your toes. Stand back up to start position.

Repeat for 12-20 reps.



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