What is a Stroke?

A stroke or cardiovascular accident is a type of cardiovascular condition that affects the blood vessels in charge of supplying blood to the brain. A stroke occurs when a blood vessel, which carries vital oxygen and nutrients to the brain, is either blocked by a clot or ruptures. The blood flow is interrupted, depriving that particular area of the brain of oxygen. Every stroke is different, with signs and symptoms that vary according to the type of stroke, the part of the brain affected, and the size of the damaged area.

Differentiating Between the Types of Strokes

Diagnosing a Stroke

The diagnosis of a stroke is based on the physical symptoms of the patient as well as medical history. A physical and neurological examination will also be performed. Certain tests such as blood tests and imaging scans such as a CT scan will also be done to determine the area of the brain involved and the severity of the stroke.
What are the Symptoms of a Stroke?

What Causes a Stroke?

As mentioned previously, a stroke occurs when a blood vessel carrying oxygen and nutrients to the brain becomes blocked by a blood clot or some other mass or when it ruptures. As a result part of the brain does not get sufficient oxygen and blood. The nerve cells in the affected area are unable to function and die almost immediately because they are deprived of oxygen. When the nerve cells cannot function, the parts of the body they control are also affected and cannot function correctly either.

The effects of a stroke can be devastating and the most common problems experienced are:

- Weakness or paralysis in the arms or legs
- Trouble swallowing
- Perceptual problems – changes to the way things are seen
- Sensory problems – changes to way things are felt
- Cognitive problems – problems experienced when thinking or remembering
- Trouble speaking, reading or writing
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Incontinence
FACE:
Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

ARMS:
Ask the person to raise both arms. Does one arm drift downward?

SPEECH:
Ask the person to repeat a simple phrase. Is their speech slurred or strange?

TIME:
If you observe any of these signs, call 9-1-1 immediately.
Help for Stroke Sufferers

Ischemic and hemorrhagic strokes are treated differently and it is essential they be treated by a physician. Treatment of an ischemic stroke involves removing the blockage and restoring blood flow to the brain. In hemorrhagic strokes, treatment consists of introducing a blockage to prevent further rupture and bleeding.

Medication such as clot-busters (e.g. aspirin) and blood-thinners (e.g. Warfarin, Which is a Rat Poisen) are prescribed. These drugs are very potent but can have harmful side effects.

Procedures such as a carotid endarterectomy (in which a blood vessel blockage is surgically removed from the carotid artery) may also be performed. Sometimes balloon angioplasty and implantable steel screens called "stents" are used to treat cardiovascular disease to relieve blockages and widen the arteries.

Holistic and natural treatments offer numerous effective methods to reduce your risk of stroke. Treatments involving herbal and homeopathic remedies are gentle and safe to use while at the same time addressing the underlying causes of the condition.
These remedies contain carefully selected herbs such as Crataegus oxyacantha (Hawthorn) well known for their cardiovascular properties and Passiflora incarnata which also relaxes blood vessels and reduces blood pressure. In addition, Viburnum opulus (Guelder Rose bark) is a very effective cardiac tonic and muscle relaxant while Ginkgo biloba improves blood flow throughout the body.

**Herbal Medicine for Stroke**

**Ginkgo Biloba**

Ginkgo biloba is used both to prevent and treat stroke. It helps to prevent blood clots from developing and increases blood flow to the brain. This herb has also been shown to inhibit free-radical formation.

Ginkgo is widely used in Europe to treat complications of stroke, including memory and balance problems, vertigo and disturbed thought processes. Many studies show that this herb increases blood flow to the brain.

Ginkgo also helps reduce fragility of the capillaries. (Capillaries are the tiny blood vessels that fan throughout your body.) This can help prevent hemorrhagic stroke. European physicians often prescribe an extract of ginkgo leaves for stroke survivors. Many doctors say that ginkgo prevents the stroke and, more importantly, it is nontoxic.

Select a product containing at least 24 percent ginkgo heterosides (sometimes called flavoglycosides) and take 40 to 80 milligrams three times daily.

Note: Seek medical advice before taking ginkgo if you are regularly taking any type of blood-thinning medication, including aspirin. In large amounts, ginkgo may cause diarrhea, irritability and restlessness.

**Garlic- (Black Garlic best)**

Garlic helps prevent ischemic stroke in three ways:

- Garlic reduces blood pressure
- Garlic lowers cholesterol levels
- Garlic is an anticoagulant.

Garlic is the best anti-clotting herb. It contains nine anticoagulant compounds. It is a major herb for heart attack prevention because of its blood-thinning effect and its ability to help control high blood pressure. These same effects also help prevent ischemic stroke.

Well- researched studies show that taking garlic (raw or as a deodorized oil capsule) dramatically reduces platelet adhesiveness allowing improved circulatory function.

Use more garlic in your cooking. You can also add it in your salad. (If you are not going for an important meeting right after that!) You can also take garlic capsules or aged garlic (preferred.). Onions, scallions, leeks, chives, and shallots have similar benefits.
Dosage: Take 500 milligrams three times daily.
Caution: If you have hemorrhagic stroke, stay away from garlic and its other anti-clotting herbal relatives.
(Ask your doctor whether you have ischemic or hemorrhagic stroke.)

**Ginger (Zingiber officinale).**

Ginger is a cardiac tonic, as it decreases cholesterol and helps poor circulation. Ginger prevents blood from clotting excessively. In one Indian study, taking about two teaspoons of ginger a day for a week neutralized the blood-clotting effect of 100 grams of butter.

You can use ginger in cooking, or you can brew ginger tea using one to two teaspoons of fresh grated root per cup of boiling water. Steep until cool. You can also sprinkle it in salads. It is a versatile herb.

**Turmeric (Cucurma longa) (Black Cumerin Best)**

Many studies show that the compound curcumin, which is found in turmeric, helps prevent the formation of blood clots. Turmeric is an important herb in Ayurveda. It is also a key ingredient in Indian cooking and can be found in most curry spice blends. You might consider eating more curry dishes. You can find several recipes in our Healthy Recipes Section.

**Carrot**

In a Harvard study of 87,245 female nurses, consumption of carrots (and to a lesser extent, spinach) significantly reduced stroke risk. Women who ate five servings of carrots a week suffered 68 percent fewer strokes than those who ate carrots less than twice a month.

Carrots are rich in beta-carotene and other carotenoids, all members of the vitamin A family. Other studies show that people can reduce their risk of stroke by as much as 54 percent if they eat lots of fruits and veggies that are rich in beta-carotene and vitamins C and E.

So, eat more carrots. They are wonderful as snacks (especially the baby carrots). Include them in vegetable soups. You can also make carrot juice. If you really want to do it right, add some garlic and ginger to provide them with zest.

**Pigweed (Amaranthus)**

A six-year Harvard study of more than 40,000 health professionals showed that compared with those who consumed the least calcium, those who got the most had just one-third the risk of succumbing to heart attack. Many experts think that this also applies to stroke because of the biological similarities between ischemic strokes and heart attack.

Pigweed is an excellent plant source of calcium, with 5.3 percent on a dry-weight basis. About one-third of an ounce of fresh pigweed leaves would provide 500 milligrams of calcium. (The Daily Value is 1,000 milligrams.)

Use the young leaves in salads or steam the more mature leaves like spinach.

**Spinach**

Studies at Tufts University in Boston and the University of Alabama in Birmingham have demonstrated that folate can help prevent both heart disease and stroke. Compared with people who consumed little folate, those who ingested the most were only half as likely to show narrowing of the carotid artery, the artery that leads to the brain.
Spinach, cabbage, endive, asparagus, papaya, okra and pigweed have folate.

**English pea (Pisum sativum), Scurfy pea (Psoralea corylifolia)**

Nearly all legumes contain genistein, a cancer-preventive nutrient. In addition to guarding against cancer, genistein also appears to have a significant anti-clotting effect. So, it may also help prevent ischemic stroke and heart attack.

You can get genistein from tofu and soy products. Or, you may choose English peas or other beans and legumes, instead.

One food that is very rich in genistein is scurfy pea. This is consumed as a food (and reputed to be an aphrodisiac) in Asia. It contain much more genistein than soybeans!

**Willow**

Willow bark is herbal aspirin, and a low-dose aspirin has been shown in several studies to reduce the risk of ischemic stroke by about 18 percent. (Low-dose aspirin also cuts heart attack risk by about 40 percent in men and 25 percent in women.)

Instead of taking aspirin, you can take a tea made from willow bark, meadowsweet or wintergreen. Add 1 or 2 teaspoons of any of these dried herbs to either hot herbal teas or cold lemonade. Drink two to three cups a day.

Caution: Willow bark and the other aspirin-like herbs should only be used to prevent and treat ischemic stroke. They are powerful anticoagulants. Hence, they may increase risk of hemorrhage, including hemorrhagic stroke. If you're at risk for this type of stroke, consult your doctor before taking aspirin or any aspirin-like herbs.

Avoid these if you're allergic to aspirin.

**Pineapple**

Pineapple contains an enzyme known as bromelain that is best known for its ability to break down proteins. It's a key ingredient in meat tenderizers. But bromelain also has an anti-clotting action that might help prevent ischemic stroke and heart attack.

**Bilberry (Vaccinium myrtillus)**

Bilberries, blueberries and huckleberries contain compounds known as anthocyanidins. European studies show that these compounds help prevent blood clots and also break down plaque deposits lining the arteries. Bilberries are also shown to help to maintain capillaries.

Bilberries and their relatives might help prevent ischemic stroke without increasing the risk of hemorrhagic stroke. One glass of huckleberry juice taken twice a week may help prevent stroke, according to herbalists.

**Evening primrose**

Evening primrose oil is rich in gamma-linolenic acid (GLA), which has potent anti-clotting and blood pressure lowering actions. It is believed to be useful in the prevention of stroke and heart disease. Borage oil is also rich in GLA.
**Astragalus**

Astragalus improves tissue oxygenation.

Dosage: Take 250 milligrams of standardized extract four times a day.

**Calamus**

Calamus helps restore brain tissue damaged by stroke.

Dosage: Standard infusion 3-9 g; Tincture - 10-30 drops.

**Cayenne Pepper**

Cayenne pepper improves circulation and heart function without raising blood pressure. It also enhances the power of other herbs taken at the same time.

Dosage: Take 100 milligrams twice daily, with meals.

**Green Tea**

Green tea may act as one of the most potent free-radical scavengers to protect against the peroxidation of lipids, a contributing factor in atherosclerosis.

Choose a decaffeinated standardized extract containing at least 50 percent catechins and 90 percent total polyphenols, and take 300 to 500 milligrams daily.

**Hawthorn**

Hawthorn has been reported to prevent or slow the progression of arteriosclerosis.

Dosage: Choose a standardized extract containing 1.8 percent vitexin-2 rhamnosides and take 100 to 200 milligrams two or three times a day.

**Horsetail**

The silica in horsetail maintains the elastic connective tissue of the arteries. It promotes arterial impermeability to harmful lipids, preventing deposits.

Dosage: Take 1 cup of horsetail tea or 1 tbsp. of horsetail juice three times daily.

**Kava kava**

Kava kava helps to protect the brain against oxygen deprivation.

Dose: Choose a standardized extract containing 30 percent kavalactones and take 250 milligrams twice a day.

Note: In excess amounts, this herb can cause drowsiness. Do not exceed the recommended dose. Do not use kava kava if you are pregnant or nursing, if you have Parkinson’s disease, or if you are taking a prescription medication for depression or anxiety.

**Pine-bark and Grape-seed Extract**
Pine-bark and grape-seed extract are high in proanthocyanidins (also known as OPCs) that increase the structural strength of weakened blood vessels.
Dosage: Take 25 to 50 milligrams of either two or three times daily.

**Herbs for improving the circulation to extremities:** elder flowers, hyssop, rosemary, yarrow.

**Herbs for nourishing the nervous system:** damiana, lavender, rosemary, Siberian ginseng.

How Poisonous Is Lily of the Valley?
Matt Soniak

We don't want to spoil anything from this season of *Breaking Bad* for those who haven't seen it. But for the floss readers curious about lily of the valley, a plant that played a part in Sunday's season finale, we're happy to talk botany. Read on at your own risk.

**So, what is lily of the valley?**
Known by the scientific name *Convallaria majalis*, the lily of the valley is an herbaceous (the leaves and stems die at the end of the growing season and there's no persistent woody stem) perennial found in temperate areas of the Northern Hemisphere. The plant forms large colonies by spreading underground stems and appears above ground with upright stems called pips. The lily blooms in the late spring and has white, bell-shaped, sweet-smelling flowers and small orange-red berries.
The plant pops up in Christian legend several times. As the story goes, lily of the valley was formed from the tears of Mary as she wept at the crucifixion of Jesus, and grew from the blood shed by Saint Leonard of Noblac during his fight with a dragon. The lily of the valley was also used as the floral emblem of Yugoslavia and is the national flower of Finland

**Is it really poisonous?**
You bet.
Toxicity is the plant's defense against animals eating its seeds. All parts of the plant—the stems, the leaves, the flowers and the berries—are extremely poisonous and close to 40 different cardiac glycosides have been found in the plant so far.

Glycosides are chemical compounds where a sugar is bound to a non-carbohydrate molecule. By increasing calcium stores in and around cells, cardiac glycosides increase the force with which the heart contracts and the volume of blood it can pump. This is not necessarily a bad thing, and these compounds have been used in medicine since the ancient Roman Empire to treat arrhythmia and congestive heart failure (today, the drugs Lanoxin, Digitek, and Lanoxicaps are made from a purified cardiac glycoside extracted from the foxglove plant). In quantities over the recommended safe dosage, though, cardiac glycosides can wreak havoc on your gastrointestinal, circulatory and nervous systems (more on that later).

**That doesn't sound good. Could it be growing in my yard?**
Possibly. The plant is widespread in the wild across Asia, continental Europe, England and the Appalachia region of the eastern United States. It's also a popular garden plant because of its sweet-smelling flowers and ground-covering ability, so it wouldn't be shocking to find it in a garden outside of its native range. Like, say, Albuquerque.

**So I definitely shouldn't be eating it, then?**
Not unless blurry vision, diarrhea, vomiting and nausea, disorientation, drowsiness, headaches, red skin rashes, excessive salivation, sudden alterations in your cardiac rhythm and possible death sound like your idea of fun.

**Oh. Let's say that, a friend of a friend ate too much. What's next?**
Get to a hospital, where treatment will include ingestion of activated charcoal, breathing support, IV fluids, an electrocardiogram and a temporary pacemaker, depending on the nature and severity of the symptoms.
Latin Name: Convallaria majalis

Alternate Names: May Lily, Our Lady's Tears, Jacobs Ladder

Family: LILIACEAE

Parts Used: Above ground portion, Root.

Properties: Antispasmodic, Cardiotonic, Diuretic, Emetic, Laxative, Purgative.

Internal Uses: Apoplexy, Coma, Epilepsy, Memory Loss, Mitral Insufficiency, Paralysis, Pulmonary Edema, Shock, Spasms, Speech Loss, Vertigo

Internal Applications: Tea, Tincture, Capsules.

Lily of the Valley increases the muscular action of the heart, yet slows the heart rate. It has an action similar to that of Foxglove (Digitalis purpurea), but is considered less cumulative and safer. It is a restorative to the brain and nerves.

Topical Applications: Flower water is used as a skin astringent, called aqua aurea, and is known for its lightening qualities. Essential oil is used in perfume, but it is very costly and synthetics are often substituted.

Energetics: Sweet, Bitter, Neutral, Moist.

Chemical Constituents: Convallatoxin, convallatoxol, convallarain, convallamarin, convalluside, convallatoxloside, saponins, essential oil, citric and malic acid, flavonoids.

Contraindications: Potentially toxic. Use only with guidance from a competent health professional. Do not use for longer than ten days at a time. Excess will cause gastrointestinal irritation. Use about one third the amount that would be used of other herbs.

Comments: The genus name, Convallaria means 'of the valleys' in Latin. Majalis, the species name, refers to the month of May, the time when this plant flowers.
Legend says that Lily of the Valley was given by Apollo to Aesculapius, God of Healing, as a gift. An old folk tale about Lily of the Valley is that if one rubs the oil from the plant on the forehead it will impart common sense. This beautiful and hardy flower is often used in bridal bouquets.

The Lily of the Valley

Can you tell me what the flower that is "the lily of the valley" symbolically referred to Christ? I would like to know if this is the same 'lily' promoted as the 'Easter lily'. After examining some of the roots of the holiday called "Easter", it is easy to see that most of this 'holiday' has nothing to do with the Resurrection of Christ. I have read information that the "Easter Lily" falls into the category of non-Christ related holiday decorations... however, my mother says Christ was the Lily of the Valley. Can you tell me more about this flower and whether or not it truly is Biblical with the "Easter" celebration?

This is not a question I have ever had before. I have had to do a bit of research. In my simplicity, I had always looked on Easter lilies as a harmless decoration people would use in the spring. I had never considered its traditional and historical significance. I was surprised by what I found. But first, let's look at your questions--you indeed you have asked three different questions: 1)What is the lily of the valley in the Bible? 2)What is the Easter lily? 3)Are they the same? We will look at each question in turn.

Lily of the Valley

The Bible mentions lilies 15 times in 15 different verses. Of these 15 mentions, 8 of them occur in the Song of Solomon. Perhaps the most memorable verses are the following:

- **Song of Solomon 2:1**
  I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.
- **Song of Solomon 2:2**
  As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.
- **Song of Solomon 6:2**
  My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
- **Hosea 14:5**
  I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.
- **Matthew 6:28**
  And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how
they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Here in these verses, we see several things about the lilies of the Bible. They grow in the valleys and in the field. They may even grow among thorns. Sometimes, they are cultivated to grow in planted gardens. In speaking of God’s blessing on Israel, Hosea states that "he shall grow as the lily." This indicates that the lily grows rapidly and commonly in many places.

The many places the lily is found in the Bible (valleys, fields, gardens, among thorns) shows the lily to be a common representation of a wide variety of flowers. This is similar to the usage of lily in English. The dictionary says that the lily is a large genus of perennial plants of the lily family grown from a bulb and having typically trumpet-shaped flowers, some white and some colored. Several plants that are similar to the true lily are also called lilies. In like manner, the biblical lily would refer to a large range of flowering plants that normally grew in the wild fields and covered the valleys at certain times of the year.

Most Bible students agree that the "lily of the valleys" in Song of Solomon 2:1 is a type of Jesus Christ. Benjamin Keach, in his books on types, gives five comparisons between the lily of the valley and the Lord Jesus Christ. Here are his points summarized:

1. A lily is a sweet and a flagrant flower with a strong scent. Jesus has a sweetness in His ministry especially when He gave "himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" (Ephesians 5:2).
2. A lily is white and very beautiful; exceeding all other flowers for whiteness. Within it are seven grains or seeds that are the color of gold. White is a picture of purity (Revelation 3:4). The bride of the Lamb will be clothed in white (Revelation 19:8). What better representation of the purity of Jesus Christ, the one "who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21), who "did no sin" (1 Peter 2:22), who was tempted "yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15), and who "in him is no sin" (1 John 3:5), than a beautiful white lily? "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26).
3. A lily is very fruitful. One root may put forth fifty bulbs. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, He brings forth much fruit (John 12:24). It is by bearing much fruit that He glorified the Father (John 15:8).

4. A lily, according to the ancient writer Pliny, is the tallest of flowers and yet hangs its head down. This a beautiful picture of the greatness of the Son of God matched only by the greatness of His humility. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).

5. The lily has many medicinal qualities. According to ancient teaching, it could be used to restore a lost voice, help faintness, was good for the liver, and helped dropsy. The Lord Jesus Christ is the great physician and is fully capable of curing all diseases and maladies of the soul.

Certainly, the lily of the valleys is a beautiful picture and type of the Lord Jesus Christ.
Dramatically effective natural treatment found for stroke-caused brain damage

(NaturalNews) Research findings just announced at the Canadian Stroke Congress provide hopeful news for stroke victims. A treatment has been documented that can improve memory, language, thinking and judgment problems by almost 50 percent -- all within about six months after a person suffers a stroke. The therapy isn't a new Big Pharma drug or surgical treatment. Instead, it is simply consistent exercise that triggers healing in the brain.
41 patients, of whom 70 percent had mild to moderate walking problems requiring a cane or walker, took part in a five-day-a-week aerobic and strength/resistance training program that was adapted to their physical limitations. The workouts included walking, lifting weights and doing squats and were designed to imitate activities most healthy people would do in daily life. The results? At the conclusion of the program, the researchers found "significant improvements" in overall brain function in the participants. Attention, concentration, planning and organizing improved the most. Muscle strength and walking ability improved dramatically, too.

Not only does exercise dramatically improve cognitive abilities following a stroke but it could also save the lives of many stroke victims. In a media statement, lead researcher Susan Marzolini of the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute pointed out that people who have cognitive deficits after strokes have a threefold risk of dying. They are also far more likely to be institutionalized.

"If we can improve cognition through exercise, which also has many physical benefits, then this should become a standard of care for people following stroke," Marzolini stated. "These results provide compelling evidence that by improving cardiovascular fitness through aerobic exercise and increasing muscle mass with resistance training, people with stroke can improve brain health."

Exercising to improve physical and mental status after a stroke may not sound like a new idea but it is actually an approach to rehabilitation that is too often ignored. So Marzolini is urging the medical community to give people with stroke-related impairments access to exercise programs. "Modified exercise programs are desperately needed -- they can be adapted for people following stroke, and we think they can provide huge health benefits," she emphasized.

In addition, people who have never had a stroke can up their odds of staying stroke-free by exercising. "Healthy living is important for reducing your risk for stroke,
recovering from stroke and preventing another," Ian Joiner, director of stroke for the Heart and Stroke Foundation, noted in a press statement about the new study. "All of us should manage our risk factors for stroke and, when needed, have access to information and counseling about strategies to modify our lifestyle choices."

"These healthy lifestyle studies emphasize how important it is to exercise and stay active after stroke," Dr. Mark Bayley, Co-Chair of the Canadian Stroke Congress and Medical Director of the Neurological Rehabilitation Program at Toronto Rehab, stated. "By doing so, we can increase our chances of a better outcome after stroke."

As Natural News has previously reported, the 600-year-old form of exercise known as tai chi has also been found to provide significant benefits to stroke patients. Specifically, researchers from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) found tai chi to be an effective, drug-free way to treat stroke-caused balance problems.

Alternative Therapies for Stroke Treatment

For some patients, alternative stroke treatments are an important part of recovery. Alternative therapies including acupuncture, massage, yoga, and more can help patients on the road back to wellness.

By Diana Rodriguez

Medically reviewed by Cynthia Haines, MD

**Cortaid Intensive Therapy**

After getting all of the [prescription medications needed](https://www.naturalnews.com) to help prevent another [stroke](https://www.naturalnews.com) and spending the hours needed each week to work on your muscles in rehabilitation, maybe you want to take a more relaxed approach for some of your stroke treatment.

Meditation, surrounding yourself with carefully formulated scents, rejuvenating massage, and exercise could actually help your body recover after stroke.

**Complementary and alternative medicine** (CAM) focuses on non-traditional treatments, which may be used instead of or in addition to traditional [stroke treatment](https://www.naturalnews.com) and therapy. Considering alternative stroke treatment doesn't mean that you need to — or should — abandon your doctor's...
recommendations for treatment. But alternative stroke treatment can add variety to your therapy routine, improve your mental health, and perhaps even help coax your body into healing.

**Alternative Stroke Treatment: What Works?**

Alternative stroke treatment may not work for everyone, but typically, it's not going to hurt — as long as your doctor has given you the go-ahead to try these approaches in addition to following your prescribed medications and therapy. Here are some alternative stroke treatment ideas you can consider, and how they can help:

- **Acupuncture.** Acupuncture is an ancient practice in which tiny needles are inserted painlessly in the skin at designated points to stimulate your body's nerves and muscles. Acupuncture can help to relieve pain and get your blood flowing more — and balance your energy, Asian cultures believe. Acupuncture can be used to help treat difficulties with language and swallowing, as well as paralysis. Acupuncture is a common part of stroke treatment in Japan and China.

- **Massage.** A study in Hong Kong found that regular massage lowered blood pressure and heart rate in stroke patients, and also eased anxiety. Massage is known to help with stress reduction and combat feelings of depression, both of which are common emotional health concerns of stroke patients. Keeping stress and depression under control is an important part of stroke treatment, for both mental and physical well-being.

- **Herbal medicines.** There are studies being done to determine whether commonly used Chinese herbal medicines are actually effective as stroke treatments. It is thought that these medicines may boost blood flow in the brain and offer other protective benefits against ischemic stroke. But use caution: Further testing needs to be done because studies to date just don't show enough evidence to either support or oppose using these medications. Some herbal medicines include Ginkgo biloba, Mailuoning, Xuesetong, Ligustrazine, and Acanthopanax.

- **Aromatherapy.** The benefits of aromatherapy as stroke treatment have not been extensively studied, but one very small recent study did consider the use of aromatherapy along with acupressure (another alternative method involving applying pressure to certain points on the body to relieve pain and other symptoms). Researchers used lavender, peppermint, and rosemary fragrances in conjunction with acupressure, and found that it relieved pain better than acupressure without aromatherapy.

- **Tai chi and yoga.** Tai chi is a martial art that requires balance and the use of both sides of the brain. This soothing form of exercise makes the mind and body work together to perform coordinated movements, which can benefit stroke patients. Yoga is a great stress reducer, and it may also help improve speech, balance, and dexterity. An extremely small recent study found that stroke patients saw benefit in each of those areas after taking consistent yoga classes.
Tai Chi exercise and stroke rehabilitation.

Taylor-Piliae RE, Haskell WL.

Source
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Abstract
According to reported global estimates, 15 million people suffer from a stroke each year, resulting in 5.5 million deaths, with 5 million left permanently disabled. Typical disabilities following stroke include poor neuromuscular control, hemodynamic imbalance, and negative mood state. Tai Chi (TC) is associated with better balance, lower blood pressure, and improved mood, which are important for stroke survivors. An overview of the philosophy and principles of TC exercise is provided, followed by a literature review of reported TC studies examining balance, blood pressure, and mood. Finally, the potential application of TC exercise to stroke rehabilitation is discussed.

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How to Learn Tai Chi

Edited by Jack Herrick, From Malaysia, Ben Rubenstein, Zack and 33 others

Tai chi practiced outdoors in Beijing.

Tai Chi Chuan (Taijiquan) is an ancient Chinese "internal" or "soft" martial art often practiced for its health-giving and spiritual benefits; it is non-competitive, gentle, and generally slow-paced. By increasing strength, flexibility, body awareness and mental concentration tai chi can improve your health. Contrary to the Western concept of "no pain, no gain" one hour of tai chi actually burns more calories than surfing and nearly as many as downhill skiing, so it's a veritable workout.
The art of tai chi is said to improve the flow of Chi (Qi), the traditional Chinese concept of a physically intangible energy or life force. In scientific studies, tai chi has been proven to improve a host of medical conditions including, but not limited to: muscular pain, headaches, fibromyalgia, cardiovascular problems, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Diabetes and ADHD. Though its low-impact workout is especially helpful to seniors, tai chi is for everyone and is deceptively simple in appearance. To understand the nature of Tai Chi Chuan (meaning "Supreme Ultimate Fist") we have to put it into context with the culture from where it has come from. Meaning we have to look closer at the Chinese culture and, in particular, the spiritual tradition of Taoism which is where Tai Chi Chuan finds its roots and sustenance. Now the thing to keep in mind about Taoism, and those that would call themselves Taoists, is that Taoism is about an attunement with nature. Not just nature outside of us, but also the nature within us. In fact one of the key principles of Taoism comes from the Tao Teh Ching written by the sage Lao Tzu. This principle is called Tzu Jan, or Ziran in pinyin, and it is the principle of being "self-so" or embodying one's "self-nature". So beyond the health benefits and stress relief, Tai Chi Chuan is also a means to tap into one's inner self.

This article is a beginner's guide to getting into tai chi initially and sticking with the routine of daily practice. Actual moves are not covered in this article.

**Steps**

1. Check your eligibility.

**Check your eligibility.** Anyone can do tai chi, provided you choose the gentler forms of it. The reason for this is that tai chi emphasizes technique over strength, giving every person a chance to master the art regardless of strength or age. The workout is low-impact and is therefore suitable for most people. If you have any doubts, talk to your medical practitioner.
Those who have joint, spine, fractures, or heart problems, or who are pregnant, should discuss taking up tai chi with their medical practitioner first. [2]

Find a knowledgeable teacher who is right for you. There are no degrees or credentials for teaching tai chi, [8] and the key factor is the compatibility of your learning style with their teaching style. While there may be helpful study guides, it is simply impossible to learn from a book or video. A DVD cannot correct your form, and everyone needs correction as a beginner. Moreover, the social support gained by attending a class is invaluable. Places to look for a tai chi teacher include your local health club, community center, wellness facility, martial arts studio, YMCA, or YWCA. There are many "tai chi class finders" online.

Factors in choosing a teacher include:

- There is no universal (or even widely-used) accreditation system for tai chi teachers. This often makes it difficult for a beginner to judge the veracity or suitability of a particular teacher's tai chi. A teacher without the ability to answer prolific questions and make individualized adjustments to your form is not acceptable, therefore it is best to trust your gut and keep looking until you click with the instructor.
- If you're a newcomer to tai chi, it is completely acceptable to learn from another advanced student.

- One important factor to consider is if you have any medical conditions which require special attention, such as arthritis or multiple sclerosis. If so, it is essential you choose a teacher who has experience making accommodations for your condition.

- Picking a teacher who is an hour drive away is the fastest way to getting tai chi relegated to your New Year's resolution list year after year. Ensure that you find classes that are close and handy to you.

- Pay only what you can afford. A fancy studio and a free uniform doesn't mean much if you aren't learning anything. Most traditional classes are held outdoors and are informal when compared to say, your local taekwondo school.

Pick a style of instruction.

**Pick a style of instruction.** No matter if your teacher of tai chi is a soccer mom from the burbs' or an old Chinese man with a white beard, pick a style of instruction that works for you. It doesn't matter how knowledgeable they are, if you can't understand them, you won't get any of their experience to show in your practice. Be sure to pick a teacher who has the same goals you do (in terms of health, self-defense etc.). To understand what you're in for, visit the class yourself before signing up. Teachers who refuse to allow a trial class are hiding something. Anyone who calls themselves, or insists you call them grandmaster or any other equally overblown term, is not worth pursuing. A true tai chi teacher will tell you that they are still learning to master tai chi, even after many years.[9]

- Bear in mind that tai chi is not about competition. You are not entering the class to compete with the teacher or the others in the class. You are joining the class to honor and augment the teacher's work, and to learn.[10]
Choose a style of tai chi that fits with your needs and interests.

There are hundreds of tai chi styles, but each of them has a specific focus of its own, such as health or martial arts, meaning that you need to make a decision about what you want to get from the tai chi experience. The six most popular styles, which originate from family lineages, are the: Chen, Yang, Wu, Sun and Wu-Hao and Fa styles. Yang style is the most popular when focusing on health issues, however Chen style, with its lower stances and focus on martial development, is most popular as a self-defense art. No matter the style, stick with it, and remember that despite visual differences, all tai chi styles share the same basic underlying philosophy.

- The many types of tai chi styles mean that there are over 100 movements and positions in tai chi that you can learn. Many of these carry the names of nature or animals.
- The continuity between all forms of tai chi is: concentration on breathing coordinated with rhythmic movement, and an end goal of achieving inner calm by focusing on the present.
Practice. Reading the cool tai chi magazines is fun, but the primary way to improve your tai chi is to practice. Anecdotes about one tai chi master, the famous Chen Fake, say he practiced his styles form 30 plus times a day. While you certainly don't need to go to this extreme, practicing once a day is preferable. Twice a week is about the minimum amount of practice in order to learn most effectively, and feel a tangible benefit. When practicing, focus on what you remember. Don't beat yourself up about not remembering, but rather improve what you can work on. Even if you only remember one posture, standing and holding that posture is good for you.

- Develop a routine so that it is both easy to remember and you find it a pleasant association between practicing tai chi and how you feel about your day in general.
- What you get from your Tai Chi practice is largely determined by how, and how much your are practicing. To get the most from your training consistency is needed. Set aside some time for yourself every day, fifteen minutes will do. Then, every day, take that time to care for your body and clear your mind with your practice. The reward will be well worth it.
- You can practice indoors or outdoors, with friends, or solo. Whatever fits in best for you, tai chi will work with you.
Commit to practicing for 12 weeks minimum. [15] You need at least three months of practicing tai chi before you will notice the benefits. At this point, they should be very evident and ongoing but don’t give up – give yourself at least this minimum period to see the benefits. And once you reach this mark, continue for longer and bigger benefits, and for greatly increased skill. [16]

Keep distractions out of your practice zone.
Keep distractions out of your practice zone. During the tai session, you are expected to put aside distractions and focus. The deep breathing aspect will help, as will relaxing:

- **Relax.** Tensing your body is the best way to prevent getting any benefit from tai chi. However, relax does not mean turn into a wet noodle. Retain proper posture without excess tension. Classic tai chi literature often describes this as standing "as if one were suspended on a string on the top of the head".

- **Breathe.** Part of the secret of tai chi's health benefits comes from deep, abdominal breathing. The majority of styles teach "abdominal breathing", in which one breathes in, expanding the abdominal area (not the chest) and exhales by contracting the abs. All inhalation is through the nose, exhalation through the mouth and the tongue should touch the roof of the mouth; stimulating salivary function.

- **Live in the moment.** Develop the tai chi mental discipline to live in the moment rather than focusing on anxieties.

Practice in stressful situations.

Practice in stressful situations. Once you are more proficient at tai chi, move it into your daily life to reduce stress. Practice the concepts of tai chi in highly stressful situations, such as traffic jams, or a high-intensity work meeting, to lessen the tension and restore inner calm and balance.

- As a form of meditation, tai chi is able to help you learn to understand yourself better and thereby deal with others more effectively. Thus, when stressful situations arise, tai chi learning will help you to be assertive and respectful of others, as well as staying in the present and dealing with the situation before you with calmness. Tai chi helps you learn to merge the opposing forces of yin and yang, self and the world to achieve a natural balance for physical and spiritual well-being. This balance is represented by the tai chi symbol.
Expand your repertoire. Cross-training in other forms and styles, after you've achieved a basic level of mastery in your first form, is often very helpful at improving your general tai chi knowledge. The iconic practice of tai chi are the "hand" forms; the slow movements performed in a group or solo. But tai chi includes a vast array of forms which can improve your health and self-defense abilities. Most teachers only go on to such forms after a demonstrable proficiency in the basic hand form of the style.

- Learn about weapons forms. Almost all styles, including those which disregard all martial intent, have tai chi forms practiced with weapons. These can range from simple staves or swords to esoteric Chinese weapons.
- Try a faster form. Ironically, and in opposition to the public's general idea of tai chi, most traditional family styles (including Yang, Chen, Fa and Wu) have a "fast form." This form is often used as a way of expressing the martial power honed and stored in slow form practice. Sometimes called "Cannon Fist" (pao chui) in Chen style.
- Learn about partner work. If forms practice is tai chi's solo workout, "pushing hands" (tui shou) is its partner exercise. Though eventually it can lead into free sparring, push hands is essentially an exercise meant to develop the sensitivity and skill of tai chi in a cooperative way. Generally, the learning of push hands builds steadily; moving from fixed-stance patterns with a single hand, and ending in a moving step pattern with both hands sometimes varying in height and speed.
Read deeply about tai chi.

**Read deeply about tai chi.** Classwork is one thing but learning the meaning, philosophical underpinning, and history of tai chi takes time and much of it is best done through reading and learning in your own time. This is an important part of learning tai chi because it provides you with the opportunity to get a deeper understanding of how tai chi benefits you mentally and physically, and enables you to find new ideas about enriching your tai chi experience. Other people’s learning about tai chi can inform your own and you may want to put some of their ideas into practice to see what works best for you.

- Feel free to ask your teacher questions about your self-directed learning, such as what to read and questions about what you have read. That way you will expand your understanding a great deal.
- Read the *Tao Te Ching* and the *I Ching*. These books discuss the concept of "chi" and how it can become blocked and when this happens, so does illness.
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