

Michigan Grantee Goes Virtual: Tai Chi for Arthritis & Falls Prevention

Michigan State University (MSU), an ACL grantee, has worked quickly and effectively to respond to a new virtual reality. The grantee has transitioned its tai chi classes for arthritis and falls prevention to an online format. The team worked closely with MSU Extension (MSUE) instructors and volunteers to create a checklist and guidelines for consistency and safety in classes.

MSUE started a virtual community tai chi practice on Thursday mornings and has been offering classes since April. Practice is open to any program participant that has completed at least 12 hours of instructor-led class, as well as all program volunteers and instructors.

While the pandemic is nothing to celebrate, MSU may find that a virtual approach could bring new opportunities. The immediate impact is connecting instructors, volunteers, and participants during this challenging time. But beyond that, virtual classes could make it easier for some participants to continue healthy activities for longer and to deepen their practice. Virtual class options may also create space to serve more participants if they are eventually offered in addition to in-person sessions.

Tai Chi Participant Testimonials

“When I signed up for Tai Chi and had the first class, I thought that the slow movements could hardly be counted as exercise. But as I got into it, my lower back pain began to lessen. That's when I realized it was strengthening muscles that support my spine. I'm very glad I stuck with it and will recommend it to my friends.”

“Tai chi seems to fit into a perfect place in my life. I realize it's not aerobic and I'm not burning calories, but I am stretching and bending regularly and I'm doing so without any aftermath of excess pain following the class. Other forms of exercise have yielded pain during and after the experience. Tai chi, possibly because of the deliberate motions, or the slow pace or the ability to do the forms while seated or standing has really helped me with my balance, with muscle strengthening and it is forcing me to be more active without negative side effects. Being able to do it at home, online is such a plus! I also strongly believe that the warm-up exercises and cool down exercises are such an integral part of the hour and they make the hour go quickly. I am so appreciative, and I hope I will find a way to discipline myself to include 2 to 3 hours of Tai Chi practice weekly following the classes.”

“This is really helping me and I have to tell you despite insurance coverage, I paid \$800 out of pocket a year ago for 5 weeks of Physical Therapy and it did absolutely little or nothing to help me with coordination, balance or strength. These twice weekly tai chi exercise classes have helped me quite a bit. I do my practices in between classes and that's also helping me. Thank you so much for letting me join. I am concerned about when the class ends and how I will continue, I have looked locally in the Muncie, Indiana area where I live. And despite having both a university and a health-conscious community, so far the only live tai chi classes I can find are in martial arts centers and they seem to be fairly focused on other age populations, not seniors or people with health concerns.”

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“It was very refreshing, and I am hoping it will be helpful. I have several chronic conditions (insulin-dependent diabetes, severe insulin resistance, polyneuropathy, fibromyalgia, obesity, osteoarthritis and obstructive sleep apnea)... they all unfortunately are linked and often go hand in hand, which cause less mobility and the cycle of immobility and these conditions have left me feeling crummy much of the time. I am starting slowly and will likely sit frequently here at first until I get some stamina going. I have not been able to find any type exercise that doesn't hurt more than it helps. I have wondered if Tai Chi would be the right balance for me and I think it will. Thank you for letting me take the class and I appreciate all that you are doing for our better health!”