

# Tai Chi for Arthritis

UK/European Newsletter

October 2001 Issue

## From the editor's sofa!

Despite what I said in the last newsletter about not sitting at my desk to write, this month I am banished to my study. One of our cats (we have 4, plus a dog – and 2 teenagers!) was involved in a road accident outside our cottage while I was away. The living room from where I normally stare out at the hills for inspiration is now acting as a feline intensive care unit. We 'acquired' Bruce, the cat who is injured, just after moving into the cottage some two years ago. He would have been about 3 months old at the time – initially nervous and timid – but he soon took to playing with the scratching post with fervour. In fact he would repeatedly fling himself at it, seemingly attacking it simultaneously with all 4 paws in a manner that reminded me instantly of Bruce Lee working out on a Wing Chun dummy – which is how I named the kitten (better than Tiddles or Brooklyn!). Now the vet in the village is making it quite clear that Bruce's injuries are serious – it's just that Bruce has other ideas – two weeks after a complete sacro-iliac fracture he jumped 1m out of the pen we had made for him by the patio door. He is back to taking a sly swipe at any of the other 3 cats who come during 'visiting' hours and try to steal his high-protein diet food, and chattering away at the robins and coal tits who taunt him from the other side of the patio window. And the point being? Well we have learned several lessons from Bruce's accident. Firstly, professionals don't get it right all the time – (either that or Bruce didn't understand the vet when he said he would remain paraplegic). Secondly, that with determination and strength of character, you don't necessarily have to sacrifice quality of life following an accident – you learn to adapt or simplify, but you don't give in. And finally, that simply being surrounded by those who care for you is enough to brighten even the darkest of situations. For many people, particular those in their earlier years (especially with JRA), a diagnosis of Arthritis has a devastating psychological impact – so make your TCA classes prove the traditionalists wrong – if you are an instructor work hard to understand the emotional and psychological impacts on your students, create a positive supporting environment atmosphere, and watch your students grow from within. If you are a student, work with the form, concentrate on learning to let go, enjoy the company of others and importantly learn how to perform the form in your mind, so you can use it to go back to the 'safe place' of the class at any time.

Next Issue:

Dates of Springtime UK/European Workshops.

News from Arthritis Research.

Notes on Running a Class, Background Information on Arthritis and related conditions to provide an additional learning resource to the TCA Instructors' Workbook.

Instructors of the TCA programme are encouraged to commit themselves to learning more about arthritis - not only to be able to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the health care professionals, but also to gain insight into how their students' lives might be affected on a day-to-day basis.

During my research for this newsletter, I came across an arthritis resource site on the internet that contains hints and tips sent in by members. I found the diversity and humour of the site quite amazing.

I include here a couple of examples - if any readers of this newsletter have any of their own hints and tips they want to share, please send them to me for inclusion in future newsletters.

To make getting just one coffee filter easier, take a section of filters and turn them inside out. This really works! *Submitted by: Sherry*

Another easy way with coffee filters...make a roll of masking tape and place it in the cupboard alongside the filters. Use it to pick up one and replace it next to the filters. *Submitted by: Dale*

Here's another tip, a bit far out, but it sure works. It's amazing how we can improvise to get a job done!

"I recently had the need to trim my fingernails and found that I absolutely could not squeeze the nail trimmers. I have a beagle and for some strange reason, his nail cutters came to mind. I got them out and had great success! Had to trim a little at a time (going across the nail), but they were easy to use and did a great job!" Now how's that for a strange tip?! *Submitted by: Linda*

My doctor often instructs me to wrap my painfully swollen finger joints with Coban. However, she advised me to check the pet store and buy the product VetWrap instead. Not only is it cheaper than the "human" variety, but it comes in lots of colors. If you're going to have to wear a bandage, you might as well wear one that is pretty! Additionally, someone is not as likely to grab and shake your aching hand when it's wrapped in hot pink VetWrap! *Submitted by: Joan*

When my joints are really sore I have a cheap way to make them feel better. Take a hand towel and put it under hot water...ring it out a bit and put it in a long plastic bag...tie it so no water drips out. There u just made yourself a heat wrap. *Submitted by: Chana*

## UK Instructors & Class Listings

Until the October workshop has been held, currently the only instructor in the UK is the editor of the newsletter - others will follow I hope !!

Derek Williamson  
Rising Moon Tai Chi Ch'uan  
Classes throughout Central Scotland and weekend workshops throughout UK by arrangement.  
e-mail enquiries@risingmoontaichi.com  
tel +44 (0)7973 684182

## UK Instructors' Workshop Oxford Oct 30/31 2001

By the time this newsletter is published, Dr Lam's first UK workshop will have taken place. Although I think we had initially set a limit of 40 attendees, at the last count there were 49 planning to attend, including participants from Norway and France. I asked in the last letter for a good turnout, this has way exceeded our expectations – and Margaret already has 15 on the waiting list for Paul's next visit in Spring 2002!! This really does now give us an opportunity to get the TCA into the healthcare community throughout the UK, and move south of the border from Scotland, which is where my solo effort has been confined to. I repeat what I have said previously; the task ahead of the first group of instructors will be enormous and demanding, but it will also infinitely rewarding. We are initiating something in the UK that will impact thousands (if not hundreds of thousands) of peoples' lives for years to come.

A workshop course outline can be found on the TCA website <http://www.taichiforarthritis.com>, for anyone interested in attending in Spring 2002. Contact Margaret on [s.m.terry@btinternet.com](mailto:s.m.terry@btinternet.com) or phone 01865 736225.

Exercise can help older people avert a form of arthritis that can turn ordinary activities such as getting out of bed into a painful - perhaps even impossible - chore, a study finds.

Those who regularly walked or did weight training were less likely to lose abilities to perform activities of daily living, such as getting out of bed, the study says. The report is the first to demonstrate that exercise can help people avoid relying on others for help in these ordinary activities, said researcher Brenda Penninx of the Wake Forest University School of Medicine. Penninx and her colleagues looked at 250 participants aged 60 and older. When the study started, all could perform normal activities, despite osteoarthritis of the knee. Osteoarthritis is characterized by progressive deterioration of cartilage and affects more than 80 per cent of those who reach age 70. The participants were divided into three groups. One walked for 40 minutes three times a week. Another spent the same amount of time on weight training - two sets of 12 repetitions of nine exercises, most of them for the legs. The third did no exercise and served as a comparison group. Results of the study were published in the Oct. 22 issue of Archives of Internal Medicine. After 18 months, 53 per cent of the non-exercise group reported they had lost some or all ability to transfer from a bed to a chair, bathe, use the toilet or dress. However, only 37 per cent of exercisers reported those problems.

"I definitely think that people with knee osteoarthritis would benefit from a resistance or aerobic program," Penninx said. "What this study shows is that exercise is beneficial." The researchers found the difference between walking and weight training was so slight that they considered the benefits alike. And these anti-disability benefits may extend beyond the knee, Penninx said, because 75 per cent of the study participants had arthritis elsewhere. Previous studies have found that exercise reduces pain and improves muscle tone, balance and the ability to do things such as walk, but this is the first to go to the next level and examine prevention of disability, Penninx said.

The study gives a stronger foundation to current medical support for exercise. "I can't think of anybody I wouldn't put on an individual exercise program," said Dr. Roland Moscovitz, a medical professor at Case Western University. Walking on a treadmill almost always helps, and weight training can help, too, provided the person in charge of training knows how to avoid damaging a patient's joints, he said.

Exercise probably is best for people in early stages, before development of joint deformity, extensive cartilage loss and continuing pain, said Dr. Marian Minor of the University of Missouri. "I'm trying to make a case for prescription of exercise early - not thinking you are going to rescue people later," said Minor, a researcher not connected with the study. In addition, keeping people active will reduce the chance that a sedentary lifestyle will lead them to develop heart disease in addition to the arthritis, Minor said.

## Breaking new ground

I have decided to modify and re-run this piece as it might be of interest to those October participants who intend to go on to teach the programme.

Being the first TCA Instructor in the UK is an interesting learning experience. In promoting TCA to primary health care units, care homes, arthritis organisations etc I have been generally well-received, with maybe the occasional sceptical exception. Newspapers might cover the story if there are no 'drop the dead donkey' items. Radio/TV coverage as yet has failed to materialise. The local councils fail to understand the social benefits of this course and insist on prohibitive commercial hire rates, so I need eyes and ears everywhere to find suitable affordable premises for classes. And throughout this, I have no-one else's experiences to benchmark my progress against or ear to bend. I did benefit from comments and suggestions from fellow participants at the Oakland workshop, but things are so much more conservative in the UK. What has worked quite well is using a formally structured presentation I prepared in Microsoft Powerpoint. It basically follows the structure Paul describes in his workshop, and helps to ensure that I can explain with some competence my understanding of arthritis and how TCA can help. I usually follow the presentation with a demonstration of the 12-step and maybe the mirrored version - what I found very useful was to actually get them involved in a couple of the movements - 'lifting hands' and 'cloud hands' are ideal - if your demo can provoke similar reactions to 'that's made me feel relaxed just watching it', then that's it - they are hooked - get commitment for their support there and then - if you have made the right impression you will get permission to place your posters and flyers and get referrals!

For those who don't want to reinvent the wheel, I can provide fully personalised copies of the presentation ready to use. The presentation pack contains:

- Presentation slides, colour laser printed onto 15 A4 acetates
- Slides customised with your own name and club/school logo
- Soft copies supplied on a 3.5" disk
  - A fully editable version allowing further tailoring or customisation
  - A self-executable presentation for those that don't have access to Powerpoint themselves.
- Master print copies (mono) of handout slides for notetaking

Cost for the full pack is just £20 inc p&p.

Email me at [enquiries@risingmoontaichi.com](mailto:enquiries@risingmoontaichi.com) for further details

The internet can be a treasure trove of information providing you use it diligently. I have found these two sites helpful in my research for my TCA activities. If you have any addresses you would like to share do let me know at [enquiries@risingmoontaichi.com](mailto:enquiries@risingmoontaichi.com) or phone 07973 684182.

[www.rheuma.bham.ac.uk](http://www.rheuma.bham.ac.uk) -Birmingham Uni, informative & up-to-date research

[www.arthritisinsight.com](http://www.arthritisinsight.com) - A very user-friendly and no-nonsense site - even has lifestyle & recipe sections!