

# A Systematic Review of Research: Exercise to Prevent Falls

## (Tai Chi Anyone?)

Fall prevention programming has become increasingly important for senior health. A recent research analysis was conducted to determine the effect of exercise on fall rates and to identify the particular features of effective fall prevention programs. This review in the Journal of the American Geriatric Society suggests that among older adults exercise programs may reduce fall rates by as much as 17%.

The most positive effects of exercise on falls were obtained from programs that challenge balance to a high extent, starting at an appropriate level and individualizing the program in order to gradually increase the challenge to standing balance. The authors suggest that Tai Chi is effective for fall prevention because it meets these criteria. The minimum effective dose of this type of exercise equates to a twice-weekly program lasting at least 25 weeks. Supervised sessions that gradually increase intensity should be interspersed with instructions to practice between classes at home.

Walking programs and strength training were not included among the most beneficial in terms of fall prevention. The authors speculate that time spent in walking and strength training may reduce the amount of time devoted to practicing balance and an increase in walking activity may precipitate more falls among the frail elderly. The authors note that walking offers many health benefits and should be encouraged. However, if the goal is fall prevention, they suggest that time is better spent practicing balance.

*Source: Sherrington C, Whitney JC, Lord SR, Herbert RD, Cumming RG, Close CT. (2008) "Effective exercise for the prevention of falls: A systematic review and meta-analysis." Journal of the American Geriatric Society 56:2234.*

For information about the Connecticut Collaboration for Fall Prevention, visit [www.fallprevention.org](http://www.fallprevention.org).



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*Debbie Dong, Tai Chi Instructor and owner of Meridians in Ridgefield, leads the class in the basic movements of Tai Chi.*