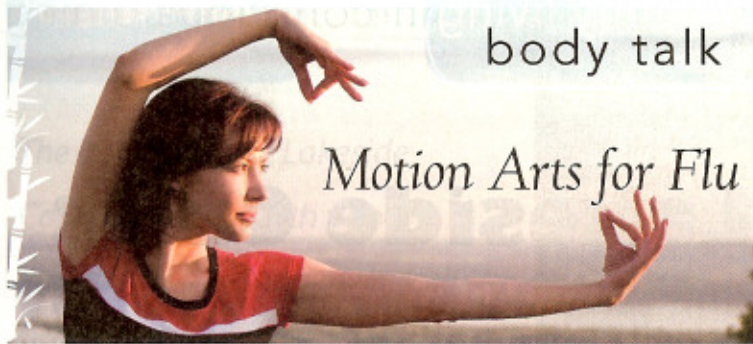


body talk

Motion Arts for Flu



BY LIZ BARKER

Echinacea isn't your only natural defense against winter health troubles. In a recent study from the *American Journal of Chinese Medicine*, researchers found that practicing tai chi and qi gong may increase your antibody response to the flu vaccine.

For about five months, 27 older adults attended three tai chi and qi gong classes weekly. At the end of the course, the students had much higher antibody responses to their flu vaccinations than did 23 control-group members. The percentage of people who reached "protective levels" of antibodies — often elusive in older adults — was also higher for those who took up tai chi and qi gong.

An ancient Chinese martial art, tai chi involves performing a series of slow, graceful movements. Qi gong, meanwhile, combines breathwork with gentle postures. Past research has shown that the practices may enhance cardiovascular function, strength and overall quality of life. "It's not surprising that you can feel the immune part, the strength part, the psychological part," notes lead study author Yang Yang. "It's what this art was designed for — to target all these different aspects of life, from a preventative and nurturing point of view."

Hold the Phone

Calling all Chatty Cathys — it may be time to give your cell a rest. Long-term use of mobile phones could lead to one form of hearing loss, suggests a study presented at the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery Foundation's recent annual meeting. Researchers found that, among 100 participants, those who had used cell phones for more than four years had more high-frequency hearing loss (characterized by an inability to hear consonants such as s, f, t and z) than those who had used cell phones for one to two years.

To protect against hearing loss, the study's authors advise using earphones and looking out for symptoms such as ear warmth and ringing in the ears.

Pollution Peril

Pollution may be the cause of about 40 percent of deaths worldwide, according to recent report from Cornell University. A research team examined more than 120 published papers on the effects of population growth, malnutrition, and environmental degradation on human diseases, finding that air pollution kills 3 million people annually. Unsanitary living conditions account for another 5 million deaths each year, while water pollution may lead to 2.7 million annual deaths.

"A growing number of people lack basic needs, like pure water and ample food," explains lead author David Pimentel. "They become more susceptible to diseases driven by malnourishment, and air, water and soil pollutants." Pimentel and his fellow researchers are now calling for more conservation of environmental resources that support human life, as well as comprehensive and fair population policies. "Relying on increasing diseases and malnutrition to limit human numbers in the world diminishes the quality of life for all humans and is a high-risk policy," they write in the study's conclusion. 🐦

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